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by CHARLES *Simeon*

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by CHARLES Simeon

VOLUME 14

JOHN XIII

ACTS

ZONDERVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE
Grand Rapids 1955 Michigan

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EXPOSITORY OUTLINES
ON THE WHOLE BIBLE

was formerly published as "Horae Homileticae." This reprint edition was made from the 8th edition published by Henry G. Bolm, Publishers, London in 1847. It has been reproduced by the photo offset process.

Printed in the United States of America

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JOHN.

OUTLINE NO. 1678

CHRIST'S CONDESCENSION.

John xiii. 12—15. *So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.*

THERE are some fanciful interpreters of Scripture, who find mysteries in every thing; while others, who affect a supereminent regard for man's reasoning powers, banish mysteries altogether, and say, "Where mystery begins religion ends." These are equally distant from the true method of interpreting the sacred oracles; and are almost equally adverse to the interests of religion: the former bring the truth into contempt; the latter utterly discard it. The proper medium evidently is, to follow the direction which the Scripture itself gives us. The fundamental doctrines of the Gospel are professedly mysterious, even "the wisdom of God in a mystery." There are many of the historical parts also, to which a mystical interpretation is given by the inspired writers: and, of the actions of our Lord there are some, into which a deeper insight is given us than into others; to which therefore we may safely assign a more mysterious import. The action referred to in the text was very significant, and may, with the greatest propriety, be considered,

I. As illustrative of his character—

[No one can behold Jesus washing his Disciples' feet, without feeling a reverence for his august character: and the more we contrast his dignity with their meanness, the more are we constrained to admire his condescension and love.

But we shall have a very partial and inadequate view of this action, if we regard it merely as a single and detached instance of humility. To understand it aright, we must see it as exhibiting in a very lively manner his *general* character.

What a beautiful illustration does it give us of *his incarnation!* Behold him laying aside his robes of majesty, and clothing himself in our flesh, and coming, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister" to our guilty race[a]!

How aptly does it represent to us the whole tenour of *his life!* From the cradle to the grave his humility was uniformly conspicuous. Born in a stable, and of mean parents, he wrought at the trade of a carpenter till the age of thirty: then, submitting to baptism, as though he had been a sinner, he entered on his ministry, and prosecuted it in the midst of temptations, of want, and ignominy, till his obedience was consummated in the accursed death of the cross. And to all this he condescended for our benefit, for our salvation.

Nor does this action less fitly characterize him in *his* present *exalted state.* "Though he is high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly[b]:" though "he is that high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, yet will he dwell with him that is of an humble and contrite spirit[c]." There is no one upon earth so mean and vile, but this exalted Saviour is ready to visit him, to dwell with him, and to minister unto him[d]: nor is there any office which he will not gladly execute for the good of our souls.

Even the character he will sustain *among the glorified saints in heaven* is also represented in this significant action: for though he will ever be the head of his people, yet will he gird himself as their servant, and minister unto them in the most humble and affectionate manner, while they are partaking of the feast which his heavenly Father has provided for them[e].

How admirable does this action appear when considered in this extensive view! and in what endearing light does it exhibit our blessed Lord!]

But this action is further to be considered,

II. As emblematical of his work—

[a] Phil. ii. 6—8. Matt. xx. 28. Mark x. 45.
[b] Ps. cxxxviii. 6.
[c] Isai. lvii. 15.
[d] John xiv. 23.
[e] Luke xii. 37.

[Our blessed Lord himself shews us that there was a mystical signification in what he did to his Disciples: for, when he had washed them, he asked them, "Know ye what I have done unto you?" for which question there could have been no room if there had been nothing mysterious in the transaction. He also said to them, "Ye are clean; but not all;" because the traitor, though washed equally with the rest, was yet under the power and guilt of all his sins[f].

So particularly were the circumstances of this event ordered and overruled, that they marked in the most striking manner *the nature*, *the necessity*, and *the excellency* of that work which Christ came to accomplish.

Its nature is declared: for he came to wash men from the guilt of sin by his blood, and from the pollution of it by his Spirit. In this very view the prophet spake of him long before as a fountain that should be opened to cleanse men from their sin and uncleanness[g]: and the Apostles represent the great end of his incarnation and death to have been, "to sanctify and cleanse the Church with the washing of water, by the word[h]."

Peter's inconsiderate, though well-meant, opposition to his Master's will, gave occasion for that solemn declaration, whereby our Lord has made known *the* universal *necessity* of submitting to him, and to the method prescribed by him for the salvation of our souls. His words may be applied to every child of man, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me:" there is no other way whereby we can obtain a saving interest in Christ: we must be washed in his blood; and we must be sanctified by his Spirit: "he came not by water only, but by water and blood[i];" and we must experience the virtue of both, if ever we would participate the blessings of his kingdom.

The vehemence of the same ardent Disciple was yet further overruled for the making known *the excellency* of Christ's work. When told, that he *must* submit, he exclaimed, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." Our Lord informed him, that, as a person who has been bathing, needs no more than to wash his feet from the defilement they have contracted in coming from the bath: so they who have been washed by his blood and Spirit, need a partial purification indeed every day and hour, on account of the defilement they contract every step they take in this polluted world; but they never will need the same universal cleansing as before[k], seeing that they are purified from all their former guilt, and are "renewed in the spirit of their minds:" in respect of such an

[f] ver. 11. [g] Zech. xiii. 1. [h] Eph. v. 25, 26.
[i] 1 John v. 6. [k] ver. 10.

universal washing, "he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified[l]."]

We shall have a very incomplete view of this action, unless we still further consider it,

III. As explanatory of his will—

[A declaration to this effect is made by our Lord himself. He tells us that he intended, in what he now did, to set an example to all his Disciples; and to teach them, that they should *not affect a superiority above each other;* that they should *rather delight themselves in all offices of love;* and that they should *account nothing too humiliating or self-denying, if by any means they might promote each other's welfare.*

The Disciples had been disputing which of them should be the greatest: and he had told them, that they ought not to resemble the Gentiles, who loved to have pre-eminence, and were applauded in proportion as they gained an ascendant over others: on the contrary, *they* should measure their honours by the degree in which they stooped for the good of others, and by the exertions they made in administering to their fellow-creatures[m]. How happy would it have been for the Church, if all its ministers, and all its members, had attended to this rule! How happy if, instead of being "lords over God's heritage," they had submitted themselves one to another in the fear of God[n], and had striven only, who should be least of all and servant of all!"

To abound in offices of love is an ambition infinitely more worthy of the followers of Christ. Love is the fulfilling of the law: love is that which above all things characterizes the true Christian: love is the image of God upon the soul: love is the antepast of heaven. To inculcate the necessity of love, to exemplify it in his own conduct, to impress it on the hearts of his Disciples, and to stir them up to a holy imitation of his example, were the more immediate objects of our Lord's solicitude: nor will our admiration of his conduct profit us at all, if it have not this effect on our hearts and lives.

In many instances much self-denial is required, in order to impart any substantial benefit to our fellow-creatures. The visiting of the sick, especially when poverty and disease combine to render our access to them unpleasant, is an irksome task to those whose hearts are not penetrated with love to God and man. This indeed is less felt when humanity stimulates us to assist in the recovery of their bodies; but when we have no view but only to benefit their souls, *then* to instruct them, *then* to pray with them, *then* to repeat our visits, when perhaps

[l] Heb. x. 14. [m] Luke xxii. 24—27. [n] 1 Pet. v. 3, 5.

we see scarce any prospect of doing them good, or any desire in them to receive benefit; and *then* to persevere in our endeavours, when they madly say, like Peter, "Thou shalt never wash my feet;" *this* is the love we are called to manifest; and in comparison of this, the most liberal bestowment of alms is as nothing: it is far easier to give away thousands of silver and gold, than to spend our lives in such acts of kindness to man, and of zeal for God. But *this* is to "love others as Christ has loved us," and "to do to others as Christ has done to us:" and to exercise less love than this, is to "love in word and in tongue only, instead of loving in deed and in truth[o]."]

As an IMPROVEMENT of this subject our Lord suggests a most solemn warning; "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them[p]:" and this would I also adopt as my monition to you from the text,

1. In allusion to its mystical and emblematic import—

[Instructed as you have been, few can be ignorant of the efficacy of Christ's blood to cleanse from sin, or of his Spirit to renew and sanctify the heart. But what will this knowledge avail you, if you do not experience both the one and the other in your souls? — — — I pray you to remember, that our Lord does not say, 'if ye know these things, happy are ye:' No: an *unproductive knowledge* of them will only aggravate your guilt and condemnation: it is then only that ye can be accounted happy, "if ye *do* them."]

2. In allusion to its spiritual and practical import—

[It is intimated that *some know these things, but do them not;* but that *others both "know and do them."*

How lamentable is it that any should know the character of Christ, and profess to experience the benefits of his salvation, while yet they bear no resemblance to him in their spirit and conduct! Alas! whatever they may imagine, "they have no part with him!" without a conformity to him in the unfeigned exercise of love, we are only as sounding brass, or as tinkling cymbals[q].

To those who delight in every office of love we say, "Happy are ye:" for it is a most unquestionable truth, that the more lowly we are in our own eyes, the higher we are in God's; and the more we delight in doing good to others, the more richly will the blessing of God rest upon ourselves[r].]

[o] 1 John iii. 17, 18.
[p] ver. 17.
[q] 1 Cor. xiii. 1. Jam. i. 27.
[r] Isai. lviii. 10, 11.

OUTLINE NO. 1679

PRACTICAL RELIGION ENFORCED.

John xiii. 17. *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.*

SO little was the virtue of humility understood among the heathen, that neither the Greeks nor Romans had a word whereby to express the idea. The lowliness of mind and poverty of spirit which we admire as the summit of Christian excellence, they would have accounted meanness and pusillanimity. But our blessed Lord has instructed us in a far clearer manner than the philosophers of old could do, and has illustrated every one of his instructions by his own example. The act of condescension that is recorded in the chapter before us, very strongly exemplifies the virtue of which we are speaking: though Jesus was the Lord both of heaven and earth, and his Disciples were no higher than poor fishermen, he made himself their servant, and performed for them the meanest office, even that of washing their feet: and then told them that such was the spirit which he would have them cultivate, and such the conduct he would have them pursue towards all their fellow-disciples. He declared, moreover, that such views of Christian excellence, attended with a corresponding practice, would prove to them a source of the richest happiness.

We shall not however confine our views to this particular virtue; but shall take occasion from the words of our text to point out, in a more general manner, the connexion between "knowing and doing" the will of God. We shall shew,

I. Their worthlessness when separate—

As for doing, without knowing, the will of God, that is impossible; since knowledge is, and must be, the foundation of all practice. No act can be a religious act, unless it be done with a direct reference to the will of God ordering and directing it to be

done. But knowledge may exist without practice: and when it does so, it is altogether worthless.

1. It has no intrinsic excellence—

[The devils have knowledge in common with us, and probably to a far greater extent: but do they possess any thing that is truly good? *Virtue* is good, even though it reside only in the mind, and have no scope for exercise; but *knowledge*, when considered without reference to practice, is as empty and worthless as ignorance itself.]

2. It is productive of no good—

[The science of astronomy, and the knowledge of the magnet, are among the most useful of human attainments: but of what use would they be, if not applied to practical purposes? In the same manner, the knowledge of medicine would never benefit any one, if it were not improved for the healing or preventing of disorders. Thus it is also with respect to divine knowledge. We may be able to delineate all the perfections of God, to trace all the ways of his providence, and to open all the wonders of redemption; we may be able to descant upon virtue, in all its bearings and relations; yea, as the Apostle says, we may "understand all mysteries and all knowledge;" and what are we the better for it all, or what good do we effect by it, if it float only upon the mind, and never operate upon our life and conversation? We are only "as sounding brass or as tinkling cymbals[a]. If it be said, that, by communicating our knowledge, we may influence others; *this* only amounts to what we are insisting on, that knowledge is of use only in reference to practice; and that it then only does good, when it stirs men up to a suitable improvement of it.]

3. It only aggravates our condemnation—

[We are assured, that "to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin[b]." Exactly as much good therefore as "*sin*" does us, so much does unimproved knowledge. Knowledge is a talent, of which we are to give an account: and "to whom much is given, of him will the more be required." The man who knew his Lord's will, and did it not, was beaten with many stripes; while the ignorant offender was beaten with comparatively few[c]. Thus shall we find it in the day of judgment. If, on the one hand, unavoidable ignorance will be considered as an extenuation of our guilt, so, on the other hand, will unsanctified knowledge prove a fearful aggravation of it.]

[a] 1 Cor. xiii. 1, 2. [b] Jam. iv. 17. [c] Luke xii. 47, 48.

We would not, however, depreciate either knowledge or practice; but rather point out,

II. Their excellence when combined—

When connected with each other as the root and the fruit, they have an efficacy,

1. To please God—

[The fruits of righteousness that spring from an enlightened mind, are truly acceptable to God[d]. They answer the end for which he originally gave us to his Son[e], and for which his Son laid down his life[f]. There is not any one act that can flow from just views of ourselves and of Christ, which God will not behold with complacency and accept with joy[g].]

2. To bring comfort into the soul—

[Works of piety are like the incense which, when offered by the priest, not only honoured God, but also regaled the offerer. It is truly said (though many who admire the expression, have very inadequate notions of its import), that religion's "ways are ways of pleasantness and peace," and that "in keeping God's commandments there is great reward." Who ever set himself to serve and honour God, without finding that "the work of righteousness was peace, and the effect of righteousness was quietness and assurance for ever?" It cannot fail but that those who abound in the exercise of virtue, must have the testimony of their own consciences respecting it; and wherever that is, there must be a never-failing source of joy and peace[h].]

3. To embolden us in reference to the day of judgment—

[That there is no *merit* in our works is certain; and if we were to found our hopes of acceptance with God upon them as meritorious, we should delude ourselves to our eternal ruin. Nevertheless we are authorized to expect that God will deal with us *according to* our works: and, if we have the testimony of our own consciences that it is our endeavour to "walk worthy of God unto all pleasing," we may "assure our hearts before him," and "have confidence towards him" in reference to his future judgment[i]. Knowing in our own souls that we have fought a good fight and kept the faith, we may say without doubt or fear, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a

[d] Heb. xiii. 16. 1 Pet. ii. 5.
[e] Eph. i. 4. and ii. 10.
[f] Tit. ii. 14.
[g] Matt. x. 42. Jer. ix. 24.
[h] 2 Cor. i. 12.
[i] 1 John iii. 18—21. and iv. 17.

crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me[k]."]

4. To augment our everlasting happiness—

[Who need be told, that men will be rewarded in proportion to their improvement of their talents[l]? This is so plain a truth, that it cannot be denied; and so encouraging a truth, that it ought not to be concealed. A life of holiness is even now recompensed by the richest consolations: but its full value will be known only in heaven.]

From this SUBJECT we shall take occasion to,

1. Condole with the ignorant—

[We have before observed, that knowledge is the parent of all acceptable obedience. What then must be your state while you are ignorant of those great things which belong unto your peace? God himself has told you, that you will find "no favour" at his hands[m], but will inevitably and eternally perish[n]. Do but reflect on the condition of a soul that finds "no favour" at the hands of an angry God: surely "better were it for that person that he had never been born."]

2. Counsel the enlightened—

[Value not yourselves upon your knowledge, if you have not a practice suitable to it: for, it is "not the hearer of the law that is just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified[o]." You may say, "Lord, Lord," and profess to have known and served him in many things; but you can never enter into the kingdom of heaven, if you have not cheerfully and unreservedly performed his will[p]. Take care therefore that you "be not hearers only of his word, deceiving your own selves; but be doers of it also; for then only shall ye be blessed in your deed[q]."]

3. Congratulate the practical Christian—

["Happy are ye," God himself being witness. Every prominent feature of your character has been mentioned by our Lord as a distinct and certain ground of blessedness[r]. You are fitly "compared to a wise man who built his house upon a rock[s]." Compare the difference between such a man, and a foolish man that builds his house upon the sand: and you will then see your own happiness in a just point of view. Hold on then in this good way; and "as you have learned how to walk and to please God, see that ye abound more and more[t]."]

[k] 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. [l] Luke xiv. 14. and xix. 16, 17. 1 Cor. iii. 8.
[m] Isai. xxvii. 11. [n] Hos. iv. 6. [o] Rom. ii. 13.
[p] Matt. vii. 21, 23. [q] Jam. i. 22—25. [r] Matt. v. 3—12.
[s] Matt. vii. 24—27. [t] 1 Thess. iv. 1.

OUTLINE NO. 1680

INGRATITUDE DEPICTED.

John xiii. 18. *That the Scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me, hath lifted up his heel against me.*

THERE was scarcely any circumstance relating to the death of our blessed Lord which was not the subject of prophecy. That to which my text refers, was the betraying of our blessed Lord by one of his own Disciples. This event was shadowed forth by the treachery of Ahithophel at the time of Absalom's rebellion. He was the intimate friend and counsellor of David: yet, in the hour of David's extremity, he forsook him, and by his counsel laboured to effect his destruction. Of this David complains, saying, "Mine own familiar friend, whom I trusted, who did eat of my bread, hath lift up his heel against me[a]." But, under these circumstances, David was a type of Christ, as Ahithophel was of Judas: and the complaint which, in its primary sense, was a mere historical record, in its secondary and subordinate sense was a prophecy relating to the manner in which our blessed Lord should be delivered into the hands of his enemies.

In considering this prophecy, I shall shew,

I. In whom it may be said to be fulfilled—

We need not confine our attention to Judas: we may well extend it generally to all who partake of God's mercies, and requite them only with ingratitude. It may be considered, then, as fulfilled in,

1. The Atheist—

[God, in the works of creation, has loaded us with benefits; so that, whether we survey the heavens or the earth, we cannot but acknowledge, that his mercies have greatly abounded towards us — — — But what is the return which many make? They endeavour to shut him out, as it were, from the universe, saying, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." They deny that he takes any cognizance of the affairs of men; saying, "He seeth us not; the thick clouds are a covering to him: He regardeth us not;" "nor will he do to us either good or evil." They even go

[a] Ps. xli. 9.

further still, and say in their hearts, "There is no God[b]." Now, what a base return is this for all the benefits they receive; and what an impiety to deny the Providence, if not also the very existence, of Him, "in whom they live, and move, and have their being!" Truly they are justly called "Atheists in the world[c];" and are eminently guilty of the wickedness that is described in my text.]

2. The infidel—

[The revelation which God has given us is a stupendous display of his goodness. In it he has shewn us how we are to obtain his favour; and how, notwithstanding all our past impieties, we may be ultimately saved — — — But many make no other use of the sacred volume, than to hold it up to scorn and derision. They examine it, not to find instruction for their own souls, but rather to find occasion against it. Now, persons of this description do, in fact, tread in the very steps of Judas. He knew the Saviour personally, and availed himself of that knowledge to render his treachery the more effectual for the destruction of his Lord: and these persons acquaint themselves with the Scriptures only with a view to undermine their authority, and destroy their influence in the world.]

3. The hypocrite—

[By assuming the Christian name, we, in effect, declare ourselves servants of Christ. But, behold the Christian world! wherein do the great mass of them differ from the heathen themselves, except in the performance of some occasional rites, which have no effect whatever upon their character? Persons of this class are ready to condemn others as hypocrites, never once suspecting that they themselves are guilty of the crime which they profess to abhor. Why do they profess to believe the Scriptures, when they will not regulate themselves by them; and "call Christ, Lord, Lord, when they will not do any one thing that he commands?" To "name the name of Christ, whilst they will not depart from iniquity," is hypocrisy of the basest kind. And of such persons Christendom is full, even of persons "professing that they know God, whilst in works they openly and habitually deny him."]

4. The apostate—

[Rich is the grace, and sweet the peace, which the Lord Jesus Christ vouchsafes to the returning penitent. Where is there one, upon the face of the whole earth, who did not find him slow to anger, and ready to forgive, yea, to forgive without upbraiding? But yet, how many are drawn aside from the good way, and "leave off to behave themselves wisely!"

[b] Ps. xiv. 1. [c] Eph. ii. 12. the Greek.

One, like Demas, is turned aside by the love of this present evil world: another, like the stony-ground hearers, by the fear of persecution: another runs after some vain conceit, and "denies the Lord who bought him." Never do they reflect what dishonour they do to Christ, or what a base return they make him for all his love. They are intent only, like Judas, on the gratification of their lusts; and they sacrifice him and his interests for a thing of nought. See this man, whoever he may be, who, "after having escaped the pollutions of the world, is again entangled therein and overcome; and say, whether he be not obnoxious to the charge before us," and awfully accomplishing the prediction in my text.]

Thus extensively is the prediction verified. Let us now consider,

II. What we may learn from the accomplishment of it—

No doubt it is an instructive circumstance that our blessed Lord should be so betrayed by one of his own Disciples. We may surely learn from it,

1. That Christianity must be true—

[Had there been any collusion betwixt Christ and his Disciples, Judas would now most assuredly have made it known. But when he had agreed to betray his Master, he could do nothing more than point out his person: he could not allege any thing against him: he could not divulge any secret confided to him. And after he had betrayed his Master, so far was he from finding in his own mind any thing to justify his conduct, that he went to the chief priests, and confessed that he had betrayed innocent blood: nay more, he cast back the money that he had received, and went away and hanged himself. This was a clear proof, that, as far at least as he knew, there was nothing in Christianity which would not bear the light. If it be said, that the circumstance of our Lord's being betrayed by one of his own Disciples was suspicious, and tended to cast a reflection on our Lord himself; I answer, that our Lord himself predicted it; and declared it to all the other Apostles, on purpose that, instead of being stumbled at it, they might rather make it an additional ground for believing in him[d].]

2. That the falls of its professors afford no just argument against it—

[In all ages of the world have the falls of religious professors afforded occasion to the ungodly to pour contempt on

[d] ver. 19.

religion itself. The sins of David prompted them, not to condemn David only, but to "blaspheme God himself." And in the apostolic age, "the way of truth was evil spoken of," when its adherents did any thing unworthy of their high calling. So at this day, if there be any one of public notoriety or eminence that has conducted himself amiss, the blame is cast, not on him only, but on the Gospel itself; as though that sanctioned, and even promoted, unholy tempers and immoral conduct. But how unreasonable would it be to impute the wickedness of Judas to the principles in which he had been instructed, and to represent Jesus himself as the abettor of such impiety! There was nothing in the doctrines of Christ which could lead to such conduct; and therefore to impute evil to him and to his religion for Judas' sake, would be as absurd as to impute to the orb of day that darkness which it was created to dispel. The Gospel must be tried by a far different standard: it must stand or fall, not according to the conduct of its professors, but according to its own proper tendencies and effects. It is "a doctrine according to godliness;" and if any walk unworthy of it, the fault is not in it, but in them.]

3. That no man can tell what evil he may perpetrate, if Satan be permitted to assault him—

[Judas, no doubt, was unsound from the beginning: for being, from the first, the depositary of the stock by which our Lord and his Apostles subsisted, he appropriated sums to his own personal use: "he held the bag, and was a thief." But it was not so with Peter, or the rest of the Apostles; yet he denied his Lord; and all the rest, in his extremity, forsook him. In vain were all their resolutions and engagements when the hour of trial came: and who can tell what he himself may do, if Satan be permitted to assail him. Of all men upon the face of the earth, David was the last whom we should suppose likely to commit the enormous sins of adultery and murder: yet, in the hour of temptation he fell. And there is no man living who has not reason to cry continually, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." To every one amongst you, then, I would say, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." "Be not high-minded but fear."]

4. That God's conduct towards us is the very reverse of ours towards him—

[We, "after eating bread with him, are ever ready to lift up our heel against him." But he, on the contrary, after we have dealt ever so ungratefully towards him, is ever ready to receive us, and to admit us to the most endeared intercouse with him. He has even spread a table for us, even "a feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow, and wines on the lees

well refined;" and he invites us to partake of it. When we ungratefully refuse his invitations, he renews them with greater urgency, and directs his servants to compel us to come in. He sends them into the highways and hedges for this express purpose; and commissions them to declare, that whosoever cometh unto him, he will in no wise cast him out. Not sins of a scarlet or a crimson die shall be deemed any disqualification for his favours, if only we will accept his proffered mercy in Christ Jesus. Come then, brethren, into this state of holy intercourse with your gracious God and Saviour. Let not a sense of your past rebellion discourage you. The Prodigal Son is a just image of a returning sinner; and the reception which he met with shall be yours — — —]

OUTLINE NO. 1681

GOD GLORIFIED IN HIS SON.

John xiii. 31, 32. *Jesus said, Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him.*

IF it were asked, at what time, and on what occasion, God and his dear Son were more dishonoured than at any other period of the world, the answer probably would be, that it was in that hour, when, by the united voice of all his own countrymen, the Lord Jesus Christ was delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, to be crucified. Doubtless this would be the judgment of all who viewed that event merely with the eye of sense. But to the eye of faith it will appear in far different colours. The whole design of God in it will then be seen, and all the glory of the Godhead will be found to shine forth in it. This was the judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who, at the moment that Judas went forth for the purpose of betraying him into the hands of the chief priests and rulers, said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him."

In opening to you these most important declarations, I will endeavour to shew what glory accrued from the sufferings of Christ,

I. To the Son himself—

To enter fully into this subject, would occupy far too long a time for one discourse: I must content myself, therefore, with stating, under each head of my discourse, only the more prominent points, for the elucidation of it.

The Lord Jesus Christ was now glorified, in that he was about,

1. To complete his engagements with the Father—

[From all eternity had a council of peace been held between the Father and the Son[a]; the Father agreeing to give to his Son a chosen people; and the Son agreeing, on his part, to assume our nature, and in that nature to offer himself as the substitute and surety of sinful man. The Lord Jesus was first "to make his soul an offering for sin, and then was to see a seed who should prolong their days; and the pleasure of the Lord was to prosper in his hand[b]." The agreement is thus stated by the Psalmist; and thus recorded also by an inspired Apostle, as in part already fulfilled: "When he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not; but a body hast thou prepared me. In burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God[c]." But now the time was arrived for its completion. He was now about to endure the whole load of suffering which he had engaged to bear; and he was ready to drink to the very dregs the cup which had been put into his hands. Of the extent of its bitterness no finite imagination could conceive: but, "bloody as the baptism was, wherewith he was to be baptized, he was quite straitened till it should be accomplished[d]." And in this unshaken fortitude and fidelity he was greatly glorified.]

2. To redeem from death a ruined world—

[This was the end of all his sufferings. They were altogether an atonement made for sin. Without such an atonement no human being could be saved. By it, a way was opened for the salvation of every living man. It was for this that he had become a man: it was for this that he had fulfilled all righteousness: it was for this that he had endured his agony in the garden of Gethsemane: it was for this that he was about to expire upon the cross: and, if only he might "see of the travail

[a] Zech. vi. 13.
[b] Isai. liii. 10.
[c] Ps. xl. 6—8. with Heb. x. 5—7.
[d] Luke xii. 50.

of his soul" in the salvation of men, "he was satisfied[e]." This was "the joy that was set before him:" and, for the attainment of it, "he endured the cross, and despised the shame[f];" and rested not till he could say, "It is finished[g]." Well, therefore, might he, in the near prospect of these events, say, "Now is the Son of man glorified."]

We are next to contemplate the glory accruing,

II. To the Father, through the Son—

Now is the Son of Man glorified, and "God is glorified in him." Here, as before, we must contract our observations to the smallest space, lest we detain you too long. The Father was here greatly honoured,

1. In the display of all his perfections—

[There was not an attribute of the Deity which did not here shine forth in its utmost splendour. His *wisdom*, in having devised such a stupendous plan for the salvation of men: his *love*, in having given his only-begotten Son to die for them: his *justice*, in exacting of him the utmost farthing of their debt: his MERCY, in receiving all who should come to him in the name of this divine Saviour. His *power*, too, was displayed, in upholding his Son under all his various and complicated trials[h], and in enabling him to finish the work he had begun. His *holiness*, too, was made known, in that not a human being should ever find acceptance with him, but by acknowledging his own desert of condemnation, and pleading the merits of this vicarious sacrifice. All these perfections were now made to harmonize, and every one of them to reflect a glory on the rest: a glory of which it would never have been susceptible, if this plan had not been devised and executed for the manifestation of it.]

2. In the accomplishment of all his purposes—

[Salvation may be considered as originating with the Father, who sent his Son for the attainment of it. For the fallen angels he prepared no such mercy: but for the sons of men he determined to execute this stupendous plan, that so mercy might be exercised towards them in consistency with the demands of justice, and holiness, and truth. And all was now brought to maturity. Justice was about to be satisfied for the sins of the whole world, and a jubilee was now to be proclaimed to every child of man. Now all the millions of the redeemed stood, as it were by anticipation, around his throne, and gave him glory, such as had not yet been given from the

[e] Isai. liii. 11. [f] Heb. xii. 2.
[g] John xix. 30 [h] Isai. xlii. 1

foundation of the world: and this glory was obtained for him through the intervention of his Son: so that it might well be said, that, whilst the Son himself was glorified, the Father was glorified in him.]

We have yet further to notice the glory added,

III. To the Son, by and with the Father—

The Father now, in his turn, glorified his Son:

1. In the testimonies borne to him under his sufferings—

[Not only did several of our Lord's enemies proclaim his innocence, but universal nature bore witness to him. The sun at mid-day veiled his face in darkness; the earth quaked; the rocks rent; the dead arose: and all in attestation, that the person who had just expired was no other than our incarnate God. To these events our Lord more immediately referred, when he said, "He shall *straightway* glorify him."]

2. In the triumphant issue of them—

[It seemed as if the Saviour was vanquished, when he died: but it was "by death that he overcame him that had the power of death, that is, the devil[i]." Yes, upon the very cross itself "he spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them openly in it[k]." In vain were the stone, the seal, the watch: they were *placed by man*, to *prevent* his resurrection; but, *overruled by God*, to *attest* it. In the presence of no less than five hundred brethren at once did he ascend to heaven; from whence he sent down the Holy Ghost to bear witness to him, by mighty signs and wonders that were wrought by his Apostles in his name. Our Lord had said of the Holy Spirit, "He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you[l]:" and agreeably to this prediction did the Holy Spirit descend at the appointed time, and impart to the Apostles such powers as had never been communicated since the foundation of the world. Jesus himself, too, was then invested with all power in heaven and in earth, as the reward of his own sufferings[m], and for the benefit of those for whom he died: and together with the Father is he made the object of adoration amongst all the hosts of heaven. Hereafter, too, shall he come again to judge the world, and shall assign to all, whether friends or enemies, their proper portion.]

3. In the benefits conferred in consideration of them—

[Speedily after his ascension were not less than three thousand souls converted to him, and all the blessings of

[i] Heb. ii. 14.
[k] Col. ii. 15.
[l] John xvi. 14.
[m] Phil. ii. 9.

salvation were poured out upon them for his sake. From that day great numbers, in every quarter of the globe, have found mercy through him: millions are already seated with him upon thrones of glory, as monuments of his grace: millions, too, are at this very moment rejoicing in him upon earth: and, in due time, multitudes, countless as the sands upon the sea-shore, will glory in him as the one Author of their happiness; and will to all eternity adore him, as having "loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood, and made them kings and priests unto their God." They will all unite in ascribing "salvation to God and to the Lamb for ever and ever."

Thus, whilst the Father is glorified in him, shall he himself also be glorified by, and with, the Father, as the Redeemer and Saviour of the world.]

Let me now, in CONCLUSION, entreat you, my brethren, to be like-minded with God, and to glorify the Lord Jesus,

1. By an humble affiance in him—

[In this is he glorified, as much as by the saints before his throne. This is what he expects at our hands. This he regards as answering the end of all that he has done and suffered for us. Go then to him, brethren, with all your sins. Let nothing keep you from him. Never, for a moment, limit either his grace or mercy; but believe him "able to save to the uttermost all that shall come unto God by him." Expect also from him all those supplies of grace and peace which are needful for you in this vale of tears. Let your expectations be enlarged to the full extent of your own necessities, and to the full extent also of all his great and precious promises. This is to glorify him: as he has said, "All mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them[n]."]

2. By an entire surrender of yourselves to him—

[This also is required of you: "You are not your own: you have been bought with a price: and therefore you should glorify him with your bodies and your spirits, which are his[o]." Our Lord himself has said, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit[p]." And I may add, that herein is Jesus glorified also. Let it be seen, then, what the effect of his sufferings is, and what is the redemption that he has purchased for you. This is the way to honour him: this is the recompence he expects at your hands. And if you glorify him thus in this world, you shall assuredly be "glorified together with him" in the world to come.]

[n] John xvii. 10. [o] 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20 [p] John xv. 8.

OUTLINE NO. 1682

FAITH IN CHRIST AN ANTIDOTE TO ALL TROUBLE.

John xiv. 1. *Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.*

AS God is eminently distinguished by that character, "The Comforter of all them that are cast down," so did Jesus evince his title to it during the whole time of his sojourning on earth: there was no distress which he did not remove from those who made their application to him; and not unfrequently did he anticipate the wants, which the unbelief or ignorance of his followers made them unable to express. He had now been revealing to his Disciples the things which were speedily to be accomplished: and, perceiving that they were greatly dejected by the prospect before them, he encouraged them in the words which we have read; "Let not your hearts be troubled:" and then he prescribed an antidote, sufficient to dispel all their fears: "Ye believe in God; believe also in me."

In discoursing on these words, we shall snew,

I. The troubles which he taught them to expect—

There were three in particular which seemed most to affect them;

1. Their bereavement of his presence—

[This, if it had been only to a remote quarter of the globe, or after the manner of Elijah's departure, would have greatly depressed their minds; because of the love he had manifested towards them, and their entire dependence on him for instruction and support———but to have him withdrawn from them by cruel sufferings and an ignominious death, was distressing beyond measure; so that the very thought of it filled them with the deepest concern———]

2. The disappointment of their worldly hopes—

[They had supposed he was about to establish an earthly kingdom, and that they should be exalted to situations of great dignity. But when they heard, that, instead of reigning over other nations, he was to be rejected by his own; and that, instead of elevating them to posts of honour, he himself

was to die upon a cross; they knew not how to reconcile these things with his former professions, or how to bear the shame which such a disappointment would unavoidably occasion — — —]

3. The persecutions they were to meet with from an ungodly world—

[Hitherto they had been screened from persecution, their Lord and Master having borne the brunt of it in his own person: but now they understood that they were to drink of his cup, and to endure all manner of sufferings, and death itself, after his example. This excited painful apprehensions in their minds, and caused them the most serious disquietude — — —]

What means he used to dissipate their fears, will be found in,

II. The remedy he proposed—

The verbs in our text may be taken either imperatively or indicatively; and many think it would be better to construe both of them alike: but the spirit of the passage seems best preserved in our translation; which acknowledges, that they *do* believe in God the Father, and exhorts them to place the same confidence in him as in the Father. They now thought they should lose him entirely and for ever. To rectify this error, he enjoins them, notwithstanding his removal from them, to believe in him,

1. As present with them in their trials—

[Though he would not be present to the eye of sense, he would be really nigh to them on all occasions. Wherever they should be, there would be no bar to his admission to their souls: he would come and visit them, and dwell in them, and manifest himself to them, as he would not unto the world. This would be a far greater blessing to them than his bodily presence; so that they had no reason to regret his apparent withdrawment from them.]

2. As interested in their welfare—

[They had never found him indifferent about any thing that related to them: nor would he forget them after he should have been taken from them into heaven: on the contrary, he was going thither to prepare mansions for them; and he would still enter into all their concerns, sympathizing with them in their afflictions, and regarding every thing that should be done to them as done immediately to himself. If any should give

them a cup of cold water only, he would acknowledge it as an obligation conferred on him; and, if any should presume to touch them in a way of injury, *he* would resent it as if they had "touched the apple of *his* eye."]

3. As sufficient for their support—

[They had seen what wonders he had wrought during his continuance among them: and they must not imagine, that, because he offered up his soul a sacrifice for sin, he was therefore deprived of his power to perform them: for though he would, in appearance, be crucified through weakness, he did really possess all power in heaven and in earth. They might still look to him for the relief of every want, and support in every trial; and they should assuredly find his grace sufficient for them.]

4. As coming again to recompense all that they might endure for his sake—

[He had told them, that he would come again, and *that* too in all the glory of his Father, with myriads of attendant angels, to judge the world. They need not therefore be anxious about any present trials, since he pledged himself to remember all that they should do or suffer for him, and richly to compensate their fidelity to him.

These were subjects on which he had often conversed familiarly with them: and if only they would give him credit for the accomplishment of his promises, they might discard their fears, and be of good comfort.]

It will be not unprofitable to consider more distinctly,

III. The sufficiency of this remedy to dispel all anxiety from their minds—

Faith in Christ is a perfect antidote against troubles of every kind. Faith has respect to him in all his glorious offices and characters:

1. As the Saviour of the soul—

[What has that man to do with fear and trouble, who sees all his iniquities purged away by the blood of Jesus, and his soul accepted before God? — — — If he forget these things, he may be cast down by earthly trials: but if he keep this steadily in view, the sufferings of time will be of no account in his eyes: he will feel that he has ground for nothing but unbounded and incessant joy — — —]

2. As the Governor of the universe—

[Who that sees how perfectly every thing is under the controul of Jesus, will give way to fear or grief? Not a sparrow

falls, nor a hair of our head can be touched, without him: and, if he suffer any injury to be inflicted on us, he can overrule it so as to convert it into the greatest benefit. What then have we to do, but to let him work his own will, and to expect that all things shall work together for good? — — —]

3. As the Head of his people—

[He is to all his people the head of vital influence; and will he forget to communicate what is necessary for the welfare of his members? We are weak; and our enemies are mighty: but is that any ground for fear, whilst we remember whose members we are? Can we not do all things through Christ strengthening us? — — —]

4. As the Judge of quick and dead—

[The distribution of rewards and punishments is committed unto him; and he has told us what sentence he will pronounce on all his faithful people. And will not that word, "Come ye blessed," or that, "Well done, good and faithful servant," richly repay all that we can do or suffer for him in this world? Can we survey the thrones of glory he has prepared for us, and be afraid of the trials that await us here? — — —]

BEHOLD then,

1. The happiness of believers—

[They *may*, they *must*, have their trials; and whilst they possess the feelings of men, they will find some trials grievous to be borne: but they neither have, nor can have, any cause for anxious fear: whilst God is for them, none can be against them. Let them therefore "be careful for nothing," but "cast all their care on Him who careth for them."]

2. The misery of unbelievers—

[Where has God said to *them*, "Let not your hearts be troubled?" No such word can be found in all the sacred volume. They have need of continual fear and terror: for, what refuge have they, whilst they are not united unto Christ by faith? Whither can they go under the trials of this life? and what consolation can they have in the prospects of eternity? Better were it, if they die in such a state, that they had never been born. Hear then what Jesus says to you: Look unto ME, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God; and besides me there is none else. His address, in the text, is a proof of his Godhead, and consequently of his sufficiency to save all that come unto God by him.]

OUTLINE NO. 1683

THE COMFORT TO BE DERIVED FROM CHRIST'S ASCENSION.

John xiv. 2, 3. *In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*

A HOPE of future happiness affords strong consolation under present trials. The children of God, if destitute of this, would be "of all men most miserable;" but this renders them incomparably more happy, even under the most afflictive dispensations, than the greatest fulness of earthly things could make them. Our Lord opened these springs of comfort to his disconsolate Disciples. Being about to leave them, he not only told them whither, and for what purpose, he was going, but that he would assuredly return to recompense all which they might endure for his sake—"In my Father's house," &c.

We shall consider,

I. Our Lord's description of heaven—

We are taught to conceive of heaven as a place of unspeakable felicity. The description given of it by St. John is intended to elevate our thoughts, and enlarge our conceptions to the uttermost[a]; but a spiritual mind, which is dead to earthly things, may perhaps see no less beauty in our Lord's description.

Our Lord thus describes it; "My Father's house with many mansions"—

[Here seems to be an allusion to the temple at Jerusalem: God dwelt there in a more especial manner[b]; around it were chambers for the priests and Levites. Thus in heaven God dwells, and displays his glory[c]; there also are mansions where his redeemed people "see him as he is."]

This description may be depended upon—

[The Disciples had left all in expectation of a future recompence: our Lord had taught them to look for it, not on

[a] Rev. xxi. 19, 21. [b] 1 Kings viii. 10, 11. [c] Isai. lvii. 15.

earth, but in heaven. Had no such recompence awaited them, he "would have told them so." Thus he pledges, as it were, his love and faithfulness for the truth of what he had told them.]

Our Lord further acquaints them with the reason of his ascending thither:

II. The end of his ascension thither—

All which our Lord did on earth was for the good of his people. He consulted their good also in his ascension to heaven: he went "to prepare a place for them," which he does,

1. By purging heaven itself with his own blood—

[Heaven would have been defiled, as it were, by the admission of sinners into it; he therefore entered into heaven to sanctify it by his blood. This was typified by the atonement made for the altar and the tabernacle[d]. The type is thus explained and applied[e]—]

2. By taking possession of it as their Head and Representative—

[He is the head, and his people are his members[f]. His ascension to heaven is a pledge and earnest of theirs[g]. In this view he is expressly called "our forerunner[h]."]

3. By maintaining their title to it—

[They would continually forfeit their title to it by their sins: but he maintains their peace with God by his intercession. Hence his power to bring them finally to that place is represented as depending on his living in heaven to intercede for them[i].]

By these means every obstacle to his people's happiness is removed.

III. The prospects which his ascension affords us—

His ascension is the foundation of all our hope: as it proves his mission, so also it assures us,

[d] Lev. xvi. 15—20.

[e] Heb. ix. 21—24. Here is a parallel drawn not only between the Holy of holies and heaven, but also between the purifying of the Holy of holies by the high-priest, and the purifying of heaven itself by Christ with his own blood: and both are declared to have been necessary; the one as a type, and the other as the anti-type.

[f] Eph. iv. 15, 16. [g] 1 Cor. xv. 20. [h] Heb. vi. 20.

[i] Heb. vii. 25.

1. That he shall "come again"—

[The high-priest, after offering incense within the vail, was to come out and bless the people. This was a type of our Lord's return from heaven when he shall have finished his work of intercession there[k].]

2. That he shall take his people to dwell with him—

[He had promised this as a condition of their engaging in his service[l]. He declared it to be his fixed determination just before his departure[m]. It may even be inferred from his ascension; seeing that his ascension would have been utterly in vain without it[n].]

What a bright and blessed prospect is this! What an effectual antidote against their approaching troubles!

INFER—

1. How wonderful are the condescension and grace of Christ!

[We cannot conceive any thing more tender than the whole of this address. Such is still his conduct towards all his people — — — Let us admire and adore this compassionate high-priest.]

2. How highly privileged are they that believe in Christ!

[How different was our Lord's address to unbelievers[o]; but to believers he says, "Where I am, ye shall be also." Let this inestimable privilege have its due effect upon us; let it stimulate our desires after heaven; let it reconcile us to the thoughts of death; let it engage us more earnestly to serve God[p].]

[k] Heb. ix. 28. [l] John xii. 26. [m] John xvii. 24.
[n] 1 Cor. xv. 14. [o] John viii. 21. [p] 1 Thess. i. 9, 10.

OUTLINE NO. 1684

NO WAY TO GOD BUT THROUGH CHRIST.

John xiv. 6. *Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

THERE is in the Christian church a great diversity of character: some, like Nebuchadnezzar's image, have heads of gold, while their feet are of materials as unstable as they are unsuitable, even of iron and

clay. Others are upright in their conversation, while yet their views of divine truth are very imperfect. Such the Apostles shewed themselves all the time of our Lord's sojourning on earth: nor could the plainest instructions wholly eradicate the errors in which they had been educated from their earliest years. Our Lord had just informed them, that he was about to die, and to go to his Father; and that he would soon come again and receive them to himself, that they might be with him for ever. And, knowing that, *in general*, they were acquainted with his intentions, he said, "Whither I go, ye know; and the way ye know." But, alas! though this was true *in the general*, their minds were at present so engrossed with the notion of an earthly kingdom, that they supposed him to be speaking of some great palace, where he was about to erect his standard. Hence St. Thomas requested further information: to which our Lord replied in the explicit manner related in the text.

In discoursing on his words, it will be proper to consider,

I. Our Lord's description of himself—

He speaks of himself as,

1. The way—

[The first way to heaven was, by the covenant of works. But, when man had sinned, that way was closed for ever[a]. From that time another way was opened, through the incarnation and sufferings of God's only Son. This was announced to the unhappy pair, who were informed, that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head." To him therefore they were to look as their mediator and advocate, and through him they were to obtain reconciliation with God. There were two obstacles to their re-admission to the divine favour: these were, guilt and corruption. But both of these were to be removed by Jesus; the former by his blood, the latter by his Spirit. Thus is Christ *our* way also to the Father, making atonement for us by his meritorious death, and renewing us by his all-sufficient grace[b].]

[a] Gen. iii. 24.

[b] Amidst a multitude of passages to this effect, see Ephes. ii. 13, 16, 18. and Heb. x. 19, 20.

2. The truth—

[As the Disciples might not be able to reconcile this with the ceremonial law, which appeared to prescribe other means of access to God, our Lord informed them that the legal sacrifices were only shadows, of which he was the substance; and figurative representations, of which he was the *truth*. There had been many persons raised up as saviours and deliverers. Many different things also were intended to mark out the way of salvation: the manna from heaven; the water from the rock; the brazen serpent; the daily sacrifices, with innumerable others; but they all pointed at him as the one *true* source of reconciliation, of healing, of spiritual vigour, and of eternal salvation. He was the one scope and end of all, in whom all were united; from whom all derived their efficacy; and by whom they all were both accomplished and annulled.]

3. The life—

[It would have been to but little purpose to direct his Disciples in what way to go, if he had not told them how they might obtain life and strength to walk in that way. They, as well as all others, were by nature *dead* in trespasses and sins. Jesus therefore added yet further, that he was "the life." By this we are not to understand merely that Jesus is the author and giver of life: but that he is really to the soul what the soul is to the body. Without the soul, the body is altogether motionless and senseless. It is the soul that animates, as it were, the different members, and enables them to perform their proper functions. So, without Christ, the soul has no spiritual motion or perception: it is from its union with Christ that it has a sufficiency for any thing that is good[c]. Christ must live in the soul, as the soul does in the body. If we live, it is not *we* that live, but Christ that liveth in us[d]." Hence He both calls himself[e], and is called by others[f], "our life."]

This description will appear of the greatest importance, if we consider,

II. His declaration founded upon it—

Many are the ways which men have devised of coming unto God—

[Some have sought for mediators among their fellow-creatures. Others have trusted in their own repentances and reformations — — — Innumerable are the refuges of lies in

[c] John xv. 5. 2 Cor. iii. 5.
[d] Gal. ii. 20.
[e] John xi. 25.
[f] Col. iii. 4.

which sinners have sought to hide themselves from the displeasure of God — — —]

But there is no way to God but through Christ—

[Nothing can be plainer than our Lord's assertion. If we ask, What is the way to God? He answers, 'I am.' If we inquire, What other way there is? He answers, 'None.' If we wish to be informed whether there be not some exception in favour of those who have served God from their earliest infancy, as Timothy, or to the most advanced age, as John? the answer is, 'No: "*no* man cometh unto the Father, but by me:"' Timothy must come as Mary Magdalen, out of whom seven devils were cast; and John, as the thief, who died a few hours after his conversion. All need equally to have their guilt expiated, and their hearts renewed: and there is none but Jesus who can do either the one or the other of these things for us: *therefore* there is no other name or power but his, that can ever save us[g].]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are ignorant of the Saviour—

[Have you so little concern for heaven that you will not inquire the way thither? Or do you suppose that a life of worldliness and carnal ease is the path that leads to God; and that men will find it, as it were, blindfold? If this were the case, Jesus would never have become incarnate, and died upon the cross, to open a way for you; nor would he have warned you to the contrary in such solemn terms as those before us. Consider this; for every tittle of his word, whether credited or not, shall be fulfilled.]

2. Those who desire to come to God—

[Beware lest you attempt for a moment to find any other way than that marked out for you by Christ. He must be your *only* way of access to God. We do not say that you are not to walk in the way of holiness, (for the Scripture asserts the contrary in the strongest terms[h]) but this we say; It is the blood of Christ, and not your own holiness, that must reconcile you to God; and it is the Spirit of Christ, and not your own natural powers, that must enable you to believe in him, or to serve him. Submit to this at once[i]; for you must be brought to it, if ever you would enter into the kingdom of heaven. You cannot come to God in prayer, but by Christ; much less can you be admitted to him in heaven. Even Christ himself, as the sinner's representative, entered into heaven by his own blood[k]: think not therefore that *ye* shall enter in by any other way.]

[g] Acts iv. 12.
[h] Isai. xxxv. 8.
[i] Rom. x. 3.
[k] Heb. ix. 12.

3. Those who have already come to God—

[Yes; blessed be God, many have come, through Christ as their way, and by Christ as their life: and O, whither are they going? to their Father's house, whither Christ is gone before to prepare a place for them! What a joyful thought! every day and hour brings them nearer to their home! and, for aught they know, they may arrive at those blissful mansions within the space of a few months, or days, or even hours! Regard not then if your road be occasionally rough; but keep in it; press forward; turn not from it even to the end; and, "when Christ, who is your life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."]

OUTLINE NO. 1685

CHRIST ONE WITH THE FATHER.

John xiv. 8—11. *Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake.*

IT was a great advantage to the Apostles, that, at the close of his daily ministrations, they were admitted to a more intimate and familiar intercourse with their Lord: for by this means they received a much fuller instruction than others, and gained a deeper insight than others into the discourses which had been publicly delivered. Nor do *we* derive less benefit from this than they: because the explanations which were given to them in private are handed down to us, and unfold to us many things which we should not otherwise have been able to comprehend. We behold, too, their errors rectified. They were greatly mistaken in many things. Their spirit was far from being, on some occasions, what God would approve; as for instance, when they would have called fire from heaven to consume a Samaritan village; and

also when "they disputed amongst themselves which of them should be the greatest." Their views, also, of the Messiah's kingdom were extremely erroneous; insomuch that, when our blessed Lord told them what was coming upon him, "Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, That be far from thee, Lord[a]." In like manner, they could not conceive aright of his divine character. Sometimes, indeed, they spake well respecting it: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God[b]:" but, at other times, they shewed that their judgment respecting it was very wavering and ill-informed. When our Lord spake of his equality with the Father, they knew not how to understand him: and though he told them, that, in having "seen and known *him*, they had seen and known the Father[c]," Philip, in the name of all the rest, contradicted him, and said, "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us." And this brought from our blessed Lord an answer, which is of the greatest importance to the Church in all ages, inasmuch as it establishes the doctrine of the divinity of Christ beyond all contradiction.

In opening to you this passage, we will consider,

I. The desire expressed—

This, in part, was good—

[To desire a manifestation of the Father's glory could not but be pleasing to God himself. After the giving of the law, such a revelation had been vouchsafed to Moses, and Aaron, and "the nobles" of Israel[d]; as, at a subsequent period, it had been in a more especial manner to Moses alone, in answer to that request of his, "Lord, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory." Of this request God had expressed his approbation, by "proclaiming to him his name," and causing "all his goodness to pass before him[e]." Now, therefore, at the first introduction of the Gospel, the Apostles conceived it possible that their Divine Master might favour them with somewhat of a similar manifestation; more especially because he had, without any solicitation on their part, spoken to them on the subject of "seeing the Father[f]."

[a] Matt. xvi. 22. [b] Matt. xvi. 16. John vi. 69.
[c] ver. 7. [d] Exod. xxiv. 9—11.
[e] Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19. and xxxiv. 6. [f] ver. 7.

The satisfaction, too, which they expressed, at the expected result of such a manifestation, could not but be pleasing to their Lord and Master: "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us." It must not be forgotten here, that the Lord Jesus had been speaking to them of his expected departure, an event which they could not but contemplate with extreme pain[g]. Yet, in the very prospect of such an overwhelming loss, Philip says, "Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us;" that is, there is no bereavement which we shall not readily submit to, if only this extraordinary token of the Divine favour may be conferred upon us.

In this view, I cannot but consider the request as expressing a piety like that of David, when he said, "Many say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou the light of thy countenance upon us." That is the good, the only good, that my soul desires. But]

In some respects it was faulty—

[Our blessed Lord had often represented the Father as speaking in him, and working by him, and as, in reality, one with him. Indeed, so plainly had he spoken on this subject, that his enemies had repeatedly taken up stones to stone him for blasphemy. *They* understood him to be affecting an equality with God, yea, and an identity with God: and they were filled with indignation against him on account of it, as an usurpation of the Divine prerogative[h]." And well they might be indignant, if he was not really God: for, after they had brought the accusation against him, he demanded, in yet stronger terms, their acquiescence in his claims, and their acknowledgment of him under his true and proper character. He told them plainly, that God required all men to "honour the Son, even as they honoured the Father;" that the works which he performed bore ample testimony to him as equal with the Father, because they were wrought, not, like the miracles of others, by a power derived from above, but by a power inherent in himself[i].

Now, of this the Apostles ought to have been aware: they should not have suffered things of such infinite importance to escape from their memory, or to pass without more minute inquiry into their true meaning: and least of all should they, when informed by their Divine Master in plain terms, "Henceforth ye know the Father, and have seen him," have questioned the truth of his assertion.

Inasmuch, therefore, as their reply argued a blameable ignorance and inadvertence, it may justly be considered as deserving of reproof.]

[g] ver. 2. with chap. xvi. 5, 6. [h] John v. 17, 18. and x. 30, 33.
[i] John v. 19, 23, 36. and x. 36—38.

Yet nothing could be more mild than,

II. The reproof administered—

Here let us mark,

1. How decisive was our Lord's assertion—

[" Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?" What words could our Lord have used more clearly declarative of his identity with the Father, than these? The way to estimate the force of them aright will be to put them into the mouth of any of his Apostles, or of any creature whatever. Can we suppose that any created being would use such words, and use them too in a way of reproof, and in answer to such a desire as was here expressed? No: if any creature in the universe dared to arrogate to himself such an identity with the Father, we should instantly unite with the Jews in denouncing him a blasphemer. Moreover, the very circumstance of its being a reply to such a request, and of its being uttered in so emphatical a manner; not as a mere assertion, but a reproof; and not in a way of simple affirmation, but in an appeal to the person reproved; *this*, I say, gives a weight and force to the words, which nothing can withstand. And, if they do not prove, beyond all reasonable doubt, the divinity of our Lord, we shall in vain look for words capable of expressing such an idea.]

2. How strong the testimony with which it was confirmed—

[" Believe me, that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake." The repetition of the point before asserted, and of the very words in which it had been asserted, shews the earnestness with which our Lord sought to establish and confirm it. And, if his own testimony to this mysterious truth was thought not sufficient, he was willing to abide by that which was given in his works. Here it is of importance to observe, that, in this appeal to his works, we must clearly understand him as referring to *the manner in which they had been wrought:* for otherwise there would be no force in his appeal to them; since, if the mere working of miracles were *of itself* a proof of his identity with the Father, it would prove the same in reference to his Apostles; who, as he foretold, would soon work even greater miracles than any which he had wrought. But no Prophet or Apostle ever professed to work miracles by any power of his own: they utterly disclaimed any such vain

and impious conceit[k]: whereas, Jesus, though he spoke of "his Father as doing the works," spoke of himself as concurring with the Father, in a way of personal and independent exertion[l]. And as this had been his habit from the beginning, he might well expect that his Apostles should have comprehended his meaning, and have been fully satisfied, that he was indeed "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person[m]."]

We may SEE from hence,

1. How slow even the best of men are to apprehend and believe the truths of God—

[After the day of Pentecost, the Apostles had juster views of their Lord and Saviour. They might then say with truth, "We beheld his glory, as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father[n]." But, previous to that time, they did not even understand the true nature of his kingdom[o]: and the answer of Philip clearly shewed that they did not yet fully see him as their incarnate God. And is there not reason to complain that multitudes in this day hear the Gospel, but understand it not; and have the whole counsel of God declared unto them, yet perceive it not? It is perfectly surprising, that persons should have line upon line, precept upon precept, repeated to them for many years together, and yet never attain a distinct knowledge of "the truth as it is in Jesus." But so it is: and our adorable Lord may yet, with just displeasure, address himself to many amongst us, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip[p]?" I pray you, brethren, be more attentive to the blessed truths which from week to week are brought before you; and "give more earnest heed to them, lest in future, as in past times, you let them slip[q]."]

2. How much infirmity there is mixed even with our best services—

[Certainly, upon the whole, the request of Philip must be considered as an expression of a pious mind. But yet it was full of imperfection. And who that examines his prayers, either in public or in private, must not blush at the recollection of the infirmities that have attended them? Were they all scrutinized, and weighed, as it were, in a balance, how

[k] Acts iii. 12, 16.
[l] Compare ver. 10. with John v. 17, 19, 21. [m] Heb. i. 3.
[n] John i. 14. [o] Acts i. 6.
[p] This may be illustrated either in the plainer or in the more hidden doctrines of the Gospel, as occasion may require.
[q] Heb. ii. 1.

defective would they all be found! Had Philip's error not been pointed out, he would probably have taken credit to himself as deserving the highest commendation: whereas his words rather merited reproof. Let us not, then, be too confident respecting any of our services as pleasing and acceptable to God. At all events, let us bear in mind that they are attended with many imperfections; and that, "if God were to call us into judgment for them, we could not answer him for one of a thousand."]

3. What reason we have to bless our God, who has provided us with such a Saviour—

[It is not a mere man, no, nor the first of all created beings, that is appointed to be a Saviour to us: but it is our incarnate God, "Jehovah's Fellow[r]," "God over all, blessed for evermore[s]." Hear ye this, and rejoice, all ye who feel your guilt and helplessness! It is "God who has purchased the Church with his own blood[t]:" it is God who has wrought out a righteousness for his believing people[u]: He, "in whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwells[x]," has in him "a fulness treasured up for us," out of which we are to receive, according to our diversified necessities, "even grace for grace[y]." Have you, then, seen Christ, known Christ, received Christ? You have seen, and known, and received the Father also. If Christ be dwelling in you, then does the Father also dwell in you: and, if you are one with Christ, then are you one with the Father also. Know ye this, my brethren, that He who has said, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," has added, for your encouragement, "for I am God, and none else[z]." Go on your way, therefore, rejoicing in him; and let this be your song and boast, "In the Lord Jehovah have I righteousness and strength[a]."]

[r] Zech. xiii. 7. [s] Rom. ix. 5. [t] Acts xx. 28.
[u] Dan. ix. 24. Jer. xxiii. 6. [x] Col. ii. 9.
[y] Col. i. 19. with John i. 16. [z] Isai. xlv. 22. [a] Isai. xlv. 24.

OUTLINE NO. 1686

CHRIST ENGAGES TO ANSWER PRAYER.

John xiv. 13, 14. *Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.*

THE Gospel is properly termed "glad tidings of great joy:" it finds men guilty; and reveals to them

a way in which their iniquities may be pardoned: it finds them polluted; and provides means for their restoration to the Divine image: it finds them altogether destitute; and supplies them with every thing that their souls can desire. The words before us are fully decisive on this point: they were addressed, indeed, by our Lord, to his own immediate Disciples only: but they must not be confined to any individuals of any age: they were intended for the whole world. As referring to the persons to whom they were addressed, they may be considered as including a promise of miraculous powers: but, as extending to us, they unequivocally engage that we shall possess all that we pray for, provided we ask for it in Jesus' name.

That we may more fully enter into the scope and meaning of them, we will shew,

I. To what extent Jesus will answer prayer—

Our blessed Lord is appointed of the Father to answer prayer—

[It was a part of the reward bestowed on him as Mediator, that he should have the whole universe subjected to his dominion[a]. For this end, every thing, upon his ascension to heaven, was committed into his hands; that as "a Prince" he might subdue his enemies, and as "a Saviour" he might secure the happiness of his believing people[b]. He was in a more especial manner constituted "Head over all things to his Church[c]," and furnished with an inexhaustible fulness of all good[d], that he might communicate to all according to their respective necessities[e]. He *received* gifts himself, *in order that* he might *communicate* them unto men[f]: and he will impart them to all who pray to the Father in his name.]

Nor is there any limit to his bounty in answering it—

[In our own name it is impossible to approach God: he is a holy God; and we are altogether filthy and abominable: and of this our unworthiness we ought to be deeply sensible: but at the same time we should have such a view of Christ's worthiness, as emboldens us to expect the most favourable

[a] Phil. ii. 6—11. [b] Acts v. 31. [c] Eph. i. 21.
[d] Col. i. 19. [e] John i. 16. Eph. i. 22.
[f] Comp. Ps. lxviii. 18. with the Apostle's citation of it, Eph. iv. 8.

acceptance with God for his sake. We should come trusting in his sacrifice, and pleading the merit of his blood. This is indispensable in all our addresses at the throne of grace. We must not think of asking for any thing, but in His name[g]. But if we have a becoming respect to him, we need not be straitened in our requests to God: we may "open our mouths wide, and he will fill them." Of course, a person thus humbled with a sense of his own sinfulness, and thus exercising faith in the Lord Jesus, will desire nothing but what is agreeable to the Divine will: *that* limit to his prayers he himself will readily assign[h]: he will take the promises as the legitimate standard of his petitions: and, so doing, he needs not be afraid of asking too much: the repeated declarations of Christ shall be literally fulfilled: "*Whatsoever* he asks, he shall have[i]:" yea, he shall have "exceeding abundantly above all that he can ask or think[k]:" nothing can be so great, but it shall be granted to him; nothing so small, but he shall be heard concerning it. Of this we have repeated assurances from our Lord in the words before us: "*Whatsoever* ye shall ask, that *will* I do: if ye shall ask *any thing*, I *will* do it."]

Of the accomplishment of these promises we have the strongest pledge, when he tells us,

II. For what end he will answer it—

The end for which Jesus left the bosom of the Father was to do his Father's will[l]: and during the whole time of his sojourning on earth, he invariably sought, not his own glory, but the glory of Him that sent him[m]: and in the last prayer he offered with his Disciples, he desired only to be glorified himself, that he might thereby advance the Father's glory[n]. This same end does he keep in view in answering the prayers that are offered in his name.

1. The effect of his answers is, that his Father is glorified—

[See what effects were produced by the miraculous powers which he bestowed on his Apostles: multitudes were converted by their ministry: the empire of sin and Satan was weakened:

[g] This is twice mentioned in the text; and frequently elsewhere. See John xv. 16. and xvi. 23, 24, 26.
[h] 1 John v. 14.
[i] Compare John xv. 7. and Matt. xxi. 22. with the text.
[k] Eph. iii. 20.
[l] Ps. xl. 7, 8.
[m] John v. 30. and viii. 50.
[n] John xvii. 1.

the authority of God was established over the hearts of men: and all the perfections of the Father were magnified and adored. Similar effects are produced by every communication of his grace to the souls of men; who are thereby "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Only trace the change that is wrought in the heart and life of any individual, when the Spirit of God works effectually in his soul, and it will instantly appear how greatly the honour of God is advanced by the answers which our Saviour gives to the prayers of men — — —]

2. The circumstance of the prayers being answered by *him* tends also to the glory of God the Father—

[The *power* of God would appear equally if the prayers were answered by the Father: but not so his other perfections: they are more eminently displayed by that office being vested in the Lord Jesus. By that the *justice* and *holiness* of the Father are exalted; inasmuch as men are thereby taught, that God cannot accept a sinner, if coming in his own name, nor reject him, if coming in the name of Jesus: the holiness of God prohibiting all access to him, except through a Mediator; and the justice of God withholding from none the blessings which have been purchased for them by the Saviour's blood. By that also the *love* and *mercy* of God are magnified; in that, when there was no possibility of salvation to our fallen race if left to themselves, God gave his only-begotten Son to obtain salvation for them, and to impart it to them. By that too are the *truth* and *faithfulness* of God displayed; because, the promises being given us only *in* Christ Jesus[o], the accomplishment of them *by* Christ is an evidence that "with God there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." If it should be thought by any that the delegation of this power to Christ derogates from the honour of the Father, let him know, that God the Father accounts himself then alone honoured, when equal honour is given to his co-equal, co-eternal Son[p].]

Hence then we may SEE,

1. Whence it is that so few persons receive answers to prayer—

[Many offer prayers, both in public and private; but they do not pray with that humility, or that faith, which are necessary to procure an answer from God. They do not feel that deep consciousness of their own vileness that makes a Mediator necessary: though they may notionally acknowledge Christ as their Saviour, they do not really feel the impossibility of

[o] 2 Cor. i. 20. Gal. iii. 17. [p] Phil. i. 11. John v. 22, 23.

coming to a holy God in their own name: and consequently they do not depend so entirely on the merits of Christ as the only ground of their hopes; nor do they plead those merits for the acceptance of their prayers, as they ought: hence it is that the Father does not hear their prayers; and that the Lord Jesus does not answer them. If then we would really experience the truth contained in our text, let us seek help from God, that we may be enabled to approach him in that way which alone will prevail for our eternal good — — — Let us also draw nigh to him with that frequency, and delight, which a firm belief in our Saviour's veracity must produce.]

2. What *they* should attend to who have received answers to prayers—

[That which is Christ's end in answering prayer, ought to be our end when an answer has been obtained; we should seek to glorify our heavenly Father. Do we ask, "How can we glorify him?" I answer, "In bringing forth much fruit[q]." Holy tempers, and a life devoted to the service of God, are the proper fruits of grace received. As a seal stamps its own image on the wax, so does the sealing of the Spirit impress the Divine image on the soul. By this we must judge of answers to prayer. It is not by vain conceits, or transient impressions, that we can judge, but by the practical results. "If we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, we must walk in him, rooted and built up in him;" or, in other words, "we must walk as he walked." Where such fruits of prayer are wanting, God is grievously dishonoured: it is only by a conformity to Christ in all his dispositions and actions that we can approve ourselves his Disciples. Beware then how you substitute the reveries of enthusiasm for the holiness of the Gospel: "He that doeth righteousness, (as every Disciple of Christ must,) is righteous, even as he is righteous."]

[q] John xv. 8.

OUTLINE NO. 1687

THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO OBEDIENCE.

John xiv. 15—17. *If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth: whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.*

IT has pleased God to unite man's happiness with his duty, and to ordain, that the paths of righteousness alone should be paths of pleasantness and peace. Hence our Lord, in his last discourse, wherein he laboured more abundantly to comfort his Disciples, insisted on obedience to his commandments as the best proof of their attachment to him, and the best means of securing blessings from above: yea, when he was informing them how richly the loss of his bodily presence should be overbalanced by the indwelling of the Spirit in their hearts, he first reminds them, that this benefit was inseparably connected with holiness of heart and life.

In discoursing on his words, we shall consider,

I. The promise made by Christ to his obedient Disciples—

Our Lord requires all his followers to "keep his commandments"—

[The believer is said to be "dead to the law;" but though dead to it *as a covenant*, he is as much alive to it as ever *as a rule of life*. The marriage connexion which once subsisted between him and it, is dissolved: but it is only dissolved, "that he may be married to another, even to the Lord Jesus Christ, and through him may, in the quality of his Spouse, be enabled to "bring forth fruit unto God[a]." The obeying of Christ's commandments is the only satisfactory evidence that he can give of his love to Christ. In fact, to his latest hour he must try himself by this test. All the professions in the world will be regarded as hypocrisy, if destitute of this evidence and this support. Obedience and love are inseparable from each other. Love without obedience is no better than dissimulation, as obedience without love is mere servile drudgery. The command therefore here given to the Disciples, must be considered as given to all the followers of Christ in all ages.]

To those who follow this injunction he gives the most encouraging of all promises—

[His Disciples were now about to lose his presence by reason of his removal to the worlds above. But he promised, that, "if they would obey his commandments, he would pray the Father for them, and that the Father would send them

[a] Rom. vii. 4.

another Comforter to abide with them for ever." And here let me observe, that the Holy Spirit is represented by him, not as *a quality*, or *operation*, but as *a distinct Person:* not as a *Comfort*, but a *Comforter;* who should *come from the Father*, in *answer to the intercessions of the Son*, and *abide in the bosoms of God's obedient people.* Yes, as in the days of old, God, by the bright cloud, the Shechinah, the symbol of his presence, abode first in the tabernacle, and afterwards in the temple, so will the Spirit of God now descend and dwell in the hearts of Christ's obedient followers, displaying before them his glory, and imparting to them his blessings to the full extent of all their diversified necessities. They, like the Apostles, are subjected to trials, and called both to act and suffer for their Lord: but the Holy Spirit shall give to them all needful succour and support, and make them more than conquerors over all their oppressors. Never for one moment will he leave them, till he has accomplished in them all that God of his unbounded love and mercy has ordained for them.]

Enlarging on this promise, our Lord shews his Disciples,

II. What a distinguished blessing they are privileged to enjoy—

This divine Comforter is known to none but Christ's obedient followers—

[" The world knows him not, nor can, in fact, receive him." As " the Spirit of truth " he spake in all the prophets: but the ungodly world cast his word behind their backs. In the days of our Lord they did the same. The same also they did when he spake by the Apostles. And the same they do at this day. For want of a spiritual discernment, " they see him not:" for want of an enlightened understanding, " they know him not:" and for want of holy dispositions, they neither do, " nor can receive him." Their hearts are closed against him: and are so full of corrupt affections, that he could not endure to make his abode with them. If for a moment he enter as a Spirit of *conviction*, he cannot possibly abide there as a Spirit of *consolation.* But to the obedient followers of Christ he comes with all his glorious manifestations and endearments. In their hearts he " sheds abroad the love of God:" to them he " witnesses their adoption into God's family:" and he is in them " an earnest of their eternal inheritance."]

In all this the distinction between them and the ungodly world is incalculably great—

[Mark the contrast as it is here drawn by our Lord himself, between the obedient and the disobedient Christian. The

one is benefited by the Saviour's intercession; the other not. The one has received the Holy Ghost; the other not. The one has an experimental acquaintance with the Spirit of truth; the other scarcely "knows whether there be any Holy Ghost," or, if he do, he has no delight in any thing that he knows respecting him. The one has the Spirit dwelling in him as a Comforter; the other, instead of experiencing the Spirit's consolations, cannot so much as know or receive them. The one has all the persons of the ever-blessed Trinity interesting themselves in his behalf; the other has God, even the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, for his enemy. The world may ridicule these things as enthusiasm, if they will: but they are the true sayings of God. And I pray God, that these thoughts may be laid to heart by every one here present: for, as God is true, no man shall dwell with God in heaven, who has not first had the Spirit of God dwelling in him on earth[b].]

SEE then here,

1. The importance of consistency—

[A man professes to love the Saviour, and rests his pretensions on some internal feelings and conceits of his own, whilst by his life and conversation he dishonours and denies his Lord. But to every such person our Lord will say, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Beloved brethren, whatever ye may profess, as to Christian principles, or pretend, as to Christian experience, you shall find that saying verified at the last, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord" — — — Look into the text, I pray you, and see, that *our Lord gave these promises on purpose to encourage your obedience.* If then you would be partakers of them, treasure them up in your minds, and say, 'How highly are we privileged! How wonderfully are we made to differ from the world around us! Is there no less than *a divine Person* sent down to dwell in us as our Comforter? Have *we* a Comforter, whom none but a chosen few are qualified to receive? And is this marvellous gift bestowed upon us in answer to our Saviour's intercessions? Shall we not then testify in every possible way our love to him? Has he done such things for us, *unasked*, and shall we not do for him the things which he *commands?*' This is the consistency that he requires: and this alone will be accepted as any proof of your love to him.]

2. The benefit of self-devotion—

[We suppose that some of you at least are giving up yourselves to the Lord in a way of holy and unreserved

[b] Rom. viii. 9.

obedience: look up then to heaven, and there you may see the Saviour interceding for you. There too you may see the Holy Spirit of God just ready to come down at the very first intimation of the Father's will, to take possession of your bosom, and to make your soul his habitation. From thence will he come with all his consolations and supports, so that there shall be nothing in the whole universe able to depress you, or to stop your progress in the divine life. With him shall you enjoy the sweetest fellowship, such as no worldly man can have the least idea of; and by him you shall be progressively prepared for the enjoyment of your God in heaven. Only wait on the Saviour in the way of his appointment; and his promises shall be fulfilled to you in all their boundless extent. You have seen how they were accomplished to the Apostles, and in what felicity they issued: and to those who trust in them, not one jot or tittle of them shall ever fail.]

OUTLINE NO. 1688

OUR LIFE DEPENDENT ON THE LIFE OF CHRIST.

John xiv. 19. *Because I live, ye shall live also.*

AMONGST the various sources of consolation which our Lord opened to his Disciples, to support them under the disappointment that would be occasioned by his death, a very principal one seems to have been, that they themselves would be greatly benefited by his departure: for that he would send to them his Spirit, who should more than supply the want of his bodily presence; and that he himself would more effectually advance their eternal interests than he could do if he were to continue upon earth. He assures them, that though dead as to the body, he would still live; and that, "because he lived, they should live also."

From this declaration of his we shall make two inquiries;

I. What connexion has the life of Christ with his people's life—

Those who are not altogether ignorant of Christ are yet more apt to think of him as a dying, than as

a risen Saviour; whereas his life is not at all less connected with our salvation than his death.

His life is the ground and confirmation of all our hopes—

[What do we most wish to be assured of, in reference to Christ? We wish to know *that he was indeed the Son of God*, and not a common man—*that he was sent of God* on purpose to redeem a ruined world—and *that what he did and suffered for us has been accepted in our behalf*. These are points of infinite importance, and that lie at the foundation of all our hopes. But by the resurrection of Christ they are all clearly and satisfactorily ascertained: "By that he was declared to be the Son of God with power[a]:" by that was the sign, which above all others he himself appealed to in proof of his divine mission, fulfilled[b]: and by that is the acceptance of his sacrifice made known, since the release of our Surety is an undeniable evidence that our debt is paid[c].

Hence the testimony borne by the Apostles to the resurrection of Christ, was considered as a complete and sufficient proof of every thing that they asserted respecting him."]

It is also a pledge and earnest of all our joys—

[Do we feel happiness in the thought of our being made partakers of eternal life, and in the prospect of a speedy possession of it? Behold him *risen*, him *ascended*, him *seated at the right hand of God*: in what capacity enjoys he all this exaltation? As a mere individual? No: but as the Head and Representative of all his people: in his resurrection, he is "*the first-fruits*," of which there remains a whole harvest to be gathered[d]: in his ascension, he is gone as "*our Forerunner*," "to prepare a place for us[e]:" and even enthroned as he is at the right hand of the Majesty on high, he sits not there alone; for we, though personally on earth, are mystically "made at this very hour, to *sit with him in heavenly places* in Christ Jesus[f]."

What then is his life but a pledge of ours, or rather an earnest? since it not only assures to us a future blessedness, but is itself the very commencement of our bliss?]

But the expression in our text intimates, that the life of Christ is not merely *intimately* but also *inseparably*, connected with the life of his people.

Let us proceed therefore to notice,

II. What security it affords them that they shall live—

[a] Rom. i. 4. [b] Matt. xii. 38, 40. [c] Rom. iv. 25.
[d] 1 Cor. xv. 20. [e] Heb. vi. 20. John xiv. 2. [f] Eph. ii. 6.

Here let it be considered how our Lord is occupied, and what he has engaged to do for his believing people:

1. He intercedes for them—

[As the high-priest, after offering his sacrifice, went within the vail to sprinkle the blood upon the mercy-seat, and to burn incense before it, so did our Lord ascend to heaven on purpose to complete the work he had begun, and to offer continual intercession for us at the right hand of God. Now we are assured that "him the Father heareth always;" and consequently the benefits of his intercession cannot but be poured out on all his people. Hence there is peculiar stress laid on this act of his, as ensuring to us the benefits of his death[g]. His death indeed is represented as making the atonement for our sins, and reconciling us to God; but it is his resurrection to a life of glory in heaven, that completes our justification, and perfects our salvation[h].]

2. He works effectually in them—

[By his Spirit he yet dwells in all his saints[i]: and he has engaged that "his grace shall be sufficient for them," so that the weakest of them all shall be "enabled to do all things through his strength" communicated to them[k]. It is this which renders them invincible: "their life is hid with Christ in God;" yea, "Christ himself is their life;" and therefore, when he shall appear in his glory, they will assuredly appear there with him[l].]

3. He will come at last, and take them to himself—

[When they shall have fought the good fight of faith, and gained the victory over all their spiritual enemies, they will not be forgotten of him: he will send his angels to bear up their spirits to the realms of bliss; and in due time he will restore also their bodies to life; that, in a re-embodied state, they may inherit the kingdom prepared for them. This assurance he gave to his Disciples in the preceding context[m]; and when, by that event, death shall be swallowed up in victory, then will the promise in our text be finally accomplished; and their life of grace will be completed in a life of glory.]

Behold what ENCOURAGEMENT this subject affords to all;

1. To believe on Christ—

[g] Heb. vii. 25. Rom. viii. 34.
[h] Rom. iv. 25. and v. 10. and viii. 34.
[i] See ver. 17, 18.
[k] Phil. iv. 13.
[l] Col. iii. 3, 4.
[m] ver. 3.

[Were Christ unconnected with us in his present state, we might well doubt the expediency of putting our trust in him: but when we are informed that his almighty power is always occupied in forwarding our salvation, we should instantly commit ourselves into his hands, and expect from him all that our necessities can require. Do we, as creatures dead in sin, desire life? or, as persons quickened from the dead, do we desire more life? or, being possessed of life, do we desire an assurance that we shall never lose it? Behold, Jesus, who "came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly," meets your case with exactly such a promise as you want[n]—Let me then put the question to you, "Believest thou this?" O beg of God that he would enable you so to do: say, "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief!"]

2. To suffer for him—

[Sufferings of some kind you must expect: there is not one of his people but has some cross to bear. You will find too at times that your trials are heavy: but the heavier they are, the more will his power be magnified in you. This thought afforded inexpressible consolation to the Apostle Paul[o], and made him even "take pleasure" in his multiplied afflictions[p]. Your enemies think little respecting Christ as actively engaged in behalf of his people: but in you they shall see his power and grace: and, whilst his death is exhibited in your sufferings, his life shall be manifested in your support[q]. Only take the promise in the text, and you need fear nothing.]

3. To press forward for universal holiness—

[You are not called to beat the air, or to engage either in an uncertain or an unproductive contest: you have a living Saviour, that is pledged both to give you the victory, and to reward your conflicts. Will you not then fight? Will you leave a sin unmortified, an enemy unsubdued? Gird you to the combat: put on the whole armour of God: quit yourselves like men: and know assuredly, that "your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."]

[n] John x. 10. and xi. 25, 26.
[o] 2 Cor. iv. 8—10.
[p] 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.
[q] 2 Cor. iv. 11.

OUTLINE NO. 1689

OBEDIENCE THE TEST OF OUR LOVE TO CHRIST.

John xiv. 21. *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.*

IT is supposed by many, that to profess an assurance of our acceptance with God is the very height of presumption. But, whilst we acknowledge that such a profession may be made very erroneously, and by persons who deceive their own souls, we cannot admit that no such thing as a scriptural assurance exists: on the contrary, we affirm, that a consciousness of so great a change as takes place in conversion cannot but exist in some degree; and that our blessed Lord has taught all his people to expect it: "In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you[a]." If indeed such a persuasion were to be entertained without being subjected to any test, then would it be the most enthusiastic, and most dangerous: but, if we have an infallible rule whereby to try it, then have we no reason to feel that jealousy respecting it, which so generally prevails. The truth is, that in this very passage where our Lord has sanctioned an assurance of our state, he has established a criterion whereby all our professions must be judged: nor, till our experience has been found to accord with that standard, have we any right to expect the rewards and consolations of his Gospel: "He that," &c.

Now in these words we may see,

I. How to judge of our love to Christ—

We must not imagine that the adoption of certain sentiments, or the joining of ourselves to a particular set of people, or the manifesting of a regard for public or social ordinances, or the having had great exercises of mind in reference to religion, with many hopes or fears, or joys or sorrows, or the feeling a strong confidence about the safety of our own state, are any certain proofs of love to Christ: these things not only may, but often do, exist, where there is no real love to Christ in the soul. There is one mark, and one only, whereby we can form any decided judgment about the states of men; and that is, "By their fruits ye shall know them:" they alone truly

[a] ver. 20.

love the Lord Jesus Christ, who manifest a due regard for his commandments:

1. Who "have them" in their hearts—

[Those who "love the Lord Jesus Christ *in sincerity*," desire a perfect conformity to his mind and will. With this view they study his commandments: they do not read them in a cursory way, but meditate on them, and search into them, and beg of God to open them to their view, and are thankful for any light that may be cast upon them, even though their own conduct should thereby be condemned. Having obtained a deeper insight into them, they treasure up the welcome truth in their minds, and "hide it in their hearts," as a rule of their conduct, "that they may no longer sin against him." "They account not any one of them grievous," but approve of them in their utmost extent, and "pant" after a more entire conformity to them, and long to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God[b]." They would not willingly have "a thought, that should not be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."]

2. Who "keep them" in their lives—

[Those who truly love Christ will be always "walking in the way of his commandments." Do you inquire into their *general* conduct? you will find them "labouring, not so much for the meat that perisheth, as for that which endureth unto everlasting life:" they will "not be taking thought what they shall eat and drink, and be clothed with, as the poor ignorant Gentiles do; but will seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness;" "not laying up treasures upon earth, but laying them up in heaven." In "love to the world and the things thereof, they will form a contrast with the ungodly world[c]."

In like manner, if you inquire into their conduct *under any particular circumstances*, you will know beforehand where to find them: you need only examine the commandments in relation to that subject, and you will know how they will act. You will not expect to find them conceited, selfish, querulous: because they are commanded to "prefer others in honour before themselves;" to "mind, not their own things, but also the things of others;" and "in whatsoever state they are, therewith to be content." Nor will you expect to find them censorious, passionate, unforgiving, or vindictive; because Christ has bidden them "not to judge others," or "to say to

[b] Ps. cxix. 127, 128, 131. This last verse beautifully expresses the ardent longing of his soul to be conformed to them.

[c] 1 John ii. 15, 16. Rom. xii. 2.

any one, Thou fool;" but rather to "turn the left cheek to any one that smites them on the right," and to "forgive him not only seven times, but seventy times seven."

They are not unlike a mariner that is ordered to cruize in a given latitude. There is no visible object in the ocean to which he directs his way; but he consults his chart, and his compass, and the heavenly bodies, and then makes his observations with all the accuracy that he can. The spot is not so defined, but that a difference of opinion may exist respecting its precise situation: but a skilful mariner will not be far wrong; or, if for a moment he be driven by a storm from the place he should occupy, he will be sensible of his departure, and will make every effort to return to his post again as soon as possible. Thus it is with all that truly love Christ: they have in their hands the means of ascertaining the way that they should walk in: and they use those means with diligence, knowing that any considerable and habitual departure from it will be an impeachment of the sincerity of their love. The commandments indeed, especially in circumstances of expediency, are not always so defined, but that there may be room for difference of opinion respecting the precise line of conduct prescribed by them: but, in relation to the spirit in which we should act, they leave nothing doubtful; they are as clear as the light at noon-day: so that, though a difference of opinion may exist, it never can be such as to occasion any great departure from the path of duty: and as a man, who, being ordered to cruise in a northern latitude, should go to the southern hemisphere, and then maintain that he was in his proper place, would be justly deemed unworthy of any credit as a mariner; so the man who justifies himself in the indulgence of any evil tempers, is unworthy of the name of a Christian: a proud Christian, a passionate Christian, a covetous Christian, a lewd Christian, is as much a contradiction in terms, as an infidel, an idolatrous, or a murderous Christian.]

This is the criterion whereby every man must be judged: and though there are imperfections even in the best, yet this on the whole is the true, the manifest, and the uniform character of all who really love Christ: all others, whatever they may be, only deceive their own souls[d].

Our Lord having thus accurately drawn the character of his people, shews us,

II. What to expect, if we do truly love him—

[d] 1 John v. 3. and 1 Cor. vii. 19.

It is not possible to enlarge our expectations too much, if only we confine them within the promises of God. As surely as we attain this character,

1. We shall possess his favour—

[Much as "he abhors all the workers of iniquity," he will retain no unkind thought towards us: on the contrary, "he will love us," approving our spirit, accepting our services, and "rejoicing over us to do us good[e]." The Lord Jesus Christ also says, "And I will love you." A love of benevolence he felt towards us when we were yet enemies; but now he will feel a love of complacency, even such a love as shall make him attentive to our every want, our every concern — — —

Of course, it must here be supposed, that our obedience to his commandments proceeds from proper principles; not from a desire of establishing a righteousness of our own, but from a grateful sense of his redeeming love, and from a zeal for his glory: if this be not the case, our best efforts will be even hateful both to the Father and to Christ, inasmuch as they are substituted in the place of that atoning blood of Christ, which alone can cleanse us from all sin: but if our obedience be pure in its principle, uniform in its tenour, and impartial in its extent, then shall it surely be accepted for Christ's sake, and be rewarded with the everlasting favour of our God[f].]

2. We shall have the present manifestations of it to our souls—

[There are manifestations of God to the soul, which the world have no idea of. In reading of the word, in prayer, in meditating on the promises, God will take away the veil from our hearts, and discover himself to us, and lift up the light of his countenance upon us, and "shed abroad his love in our hearts." By the communications of his Spirit to us, he will enable us to cry, Abba, Father; he will witness with our spirits that we are his children; he will give us an earnest of our inheritance, even the present foretaste of heaven itself in our souls.

Our Lord, when interrogated by Judas, confirmed this truth by repeated asseverations, and repeatedly also confirmed what he had spoken respecting the character of those to whom these blessings should be vouchsafed[g]. We may be assured therefore, that to expect these manifestations is no presumption; but, on the contrary, they are the proper portion of all who love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.]

From this subject we may clearly SEE, that religion is,

1. A holy thing—

Jer. xxxii. 41. Zeph. iii. 17. [f] See John xvi. 27. [g] ver. 22—24.

[That there are those who profess religion and yet grievously dishonour it by their conduct, is a melancholy truth; and that the prejudices of many against religion are hereby greatly strengthened, is also true: but religion is no more accountable for the inconsistencies of those who profess it, than reason is for the follies of those who pervert it. What is the true tendency of love to Christ, has already appeared: and every one must try his professions by that test.

I would solemnly call upon all those who are habitually violating any one commandment, to remember, that all their pretended love to Christ is mere hypocrisy and delusion: and the more confident they are of their own acceptance with him, the more they deceive their own souls[h].

And all who are in a measure shewing forth their faith by their works, I would exhort to abound more and more; that, "making their light to shine more bright, they may constrain all around them to glorify their heavenly Father."]

2. A happy thing—

[As there are unholy, so are there also unhappy professors of religion. But shall we therefore conclude, that Christ will not fulfil his promises to his loving and obedient people; or that there are any circumstances under which his presence with the soul cannot make it happy?]

[h] 1 John ii. 3, 4. Who would have thought that such persons as are here deseribed, exist? Yet they do exist. Compare the concluding words of this passage with the words immediately preceding the text. See also Jam. i. 26. and Matt. vii. 16—23.

OUTLINE NO. 1690

CHRISTIANS BRANCHES OF THE TRUE VINE.

John xv. 1, 2. *I am the vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.*

THE union which subsists between Christ and his Church is mysterious: the Scripture sets it forth both in figurative and plain expressions. It is spoken of not as a speculative or doubtful point, but as well known[a]. It is declared in the text under a beautiful similitude:

[a] John xiv. 20.

Christ is the vine—

If this was a continuation of our Lord's discourse, the idea of a vine might arise from what he had just before said respecting the fruit of the vine[b]: if it was spoken in his way to the Mount of Olives, it might be suggested by his passing through a vineyard. The representation respects Christ not personally, but as united to his Church.

In this view it fitly exhibits *our union with him*—

[This union is not natural to any. We are, by nature, plants of a degenerate vine[c]: we are, however, separated from it by Almighty power[d], and are made willing to be united to Christ[e]: we are then engrafted into Christ by the Spirit on God's part, and by faith on ours[f]. Thus we become branches of the true vine; and the union, when formed, is intimate and inseparable[g].]

It expresses, moreover, *our dependence on him*—

[A branch derives all its fructifying power from the root: so believers receive all their grace out of Christ's fulness[h]. Hence it is that Christ is so precious to them[i]: hence, too, they determine to live entirely by faith on him[k].]

The Father is the husbandman—

The husbandman has many offices to perform—

[He engrafts the scions, digs about them and dungs them, guards them from the weather, prunes the luxuriant branches, &c.]

The Father performs these offices—

[He chooses (but not for their superior goodness) what scions he will: he separates them from their stock by the means he judges best: he engrafts them, in his own time and manner, into the new stock: he continues to promote their good by his word, his Spirit, and his providence: he separates or combines, renews or changes, the various means of culture, as he sees occasion.]

His treatment of the branches is suited to their state—

There are "branches in Christ," which are so only in appearance—

[They have never been thoroughly separated from their old stock: they have never been truly engrafted into Christ.

[b] Luke xxii. 18. [c] Jer. ii. 21. [d] Eph. i. 19, 20.
[e] Ps. cx. 3. [f] Eph. iii. 16, 17.
[g] 1 Cor. vi. 17. Rom. viii. 35, 39. [h] John i. 16.
[i] 1 Pet. ii. 7. [k] Gal. ii. 20.

The change wrought in them has been only partial: they bring not forth such fruit as the living branches do.]

These the Father "taketh away"—

[They are a disgrace to the vine, and to the husbandman himself: he, however, exercises forbearance towards them[l]. His culture of them, in the meantime, shews their unfruitfulness to be of themselves[m]; but he will ere long separate them from the others. He will take them away, in order to burn them[n]. How fearful should we be lest we be found such branches at last! And how carefully should we examine our fruit, in order that we may not be self-deceived[o]!]

There are other branches, which are vitally united to Christ—

[They manifest that they are so, by the fruits which they produce.]

These the husbandman purges and prunes—

[Notwithstanding their fruitfulness, they need the pruning-knife. Afflictions have a tendency to make them more fruitful. God therefore sends them afflictions of various kinds. This he does to "every one of them[p]:" he even promises affliction to them as a blessing[q].]

Let us then INQUIRE whether we be living branches of the true vine—

[Let us study to answer the ends of all his care. If we be indeed fruitful branches, let us welcome affliction as a blessing in disguise. Let us, above all, seek to be confirmed in our *union to Christ*, and *our dependence on him*[r].]

[l] Luke xiii. 8, 9. [m] Isai. v. 4. [n] ver. 6.
[o] Matt. vii. 17—20. [p] Heb. xii. 6—8.
[q] Jer. xxx. 11. with Heb. xii. 10, 11. [r] Col. ii. 6, 7.

OUTLINE NO. 1691

OUR IMPOTENCY WITHOUT CHRIST.

John xv. 5. *Without me ye can do nothing.*

THE various systems of heathen philosophers were all calculated to confirm the pride of man: the tendency of the Gospel, on the contrary, is to humble and abase the soul. Its sublimest doctrines are by far the most humiliating. The sovereignty of God,

for instance, annihilates, as it were, our fancied greatness; and the atonement of Christ brings to naught our boasted goodness. Thus the mysterious doctrine of union with Christ proclaims our insufficiency for any thing that is good. Our blessed Lord declares this, first by a comparison[a], and then in plain terms, "Without me ye can do nothing."

In discoursing upon this *assertion*, I will,

I. Explain it—

In explaining the words of Scripture we must take care not to strain them beyond their obvious meaning. These must evidently be understood in a qualified sense:

They must not be understood in reference to things which come within the province of the natural man—

[A natural man has the same faculties and powers as a spiritual man: his understanding is as capable of comprehending common subjects, or of investigating the depths of human sciences: his will and affections are as capable of being exercised on objects according to their quality, as much as ever they will be when he shall be converted to God: and his memory is as retentive as that of any other man. A spiritual man has no advantage over him in these respects. Consequently, our Saviour's assertion must not be interpreted as extending to things purely intellectual, or even moral: since, beyond a doubt, a natural man may either do or forbear many things which come under the designation of morals.]

They refer exclusively to what is spiritual—

[There are different gradations or different kinds, of life, if I may so speak: there is a vegetative life, an animal life, a rational life, and a spiritual life: and the powers of each are limited to its own order: a thing which vegetates, is not capable of animal exertion; nor is an animal capable of exercising the faculties of reason; nor does the rational man comprehend or enjoy what is spiritual. If any one order of being will affect the offices of that above it, it must first attain the powers of that superior order: for without the powers suited to the object, its efforts will be in vain. There is indeed this point of difference between the different kinds of life. The three first differ in *their nature:* but the last differs only in *the application of powers previously possessed.* Yet is the last *called* a new nature, because it is produced in the soul by the

[a] ver. 4.

Spirit of God, who "opens the eyes of the understanding," constrains the will, and purifies the affections, and thus, in fact, makes the person so changed, "a new creature[b]."

But our Lord's illustration will place the matter in the clearest light.

"Christ is a vine: his people are the branches;" and by virtue derived from him they are enabled to bear fruit. If a branch be broken off from a vine, it can no more bear fruit: it has nothing in itself independent of the stem; and, if separated from the stem, it must wither and die. So we, if separated from, or *not united with*, the Lord Jesus Christ, are incapable of bearing fruit; because we have nothing in ourselves independent of him, and have no means of deriving grace and strength from him. In respect of *natural actions*, we can effect all which *nature* qualifies us to effect: but in respect of *spiritual exertions*, we are incapable of them; because, in consequence of our separation from Him, we are destitute of all *spiritual life and power*.]

This is, as clearly as I can state it, the import of our Lord's assertion, I shall now proceed to,

II. Vindicate it—

I grant, that in itself the assertion is very broad and unqualified: but in the sense in which it has been explained, it may be fully vindicated:

1. From Scripture—

[Throughout all the Holy Scriptures man is represented as dependent upon God for the communications of his grace. In himself he has nothing but evil[c]: his whole soul is corrupt[d]: and he must have "the heart of stone taken away, and an heart of flesh given him," before he can keep the commandments of his God[e]. So far is this carried, that the natural man is declared to be incapable of performing a good act[f], or uttering in a becoming manner a good word[g], or entertaining with real approbation a good thought[h]. And with this statement our Church fully accords, when, in addressing Jehovah, it says, "O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed." As far as the Scripture testimony therefore is admitted, the point is clear; and our Saviour's declaration is fully justified.]

2. From experience—

[b] 2 Cor. v. 17. with 2 Pet. i. 4.
[c] Gen. vi. 5.
[d] Jer. xvii. 9.
[e] Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.
[f] Jer. xiii. 23.
[g] 1 Cor. xii. 3. Matt. xii. 34.
[h] 2 Cor. iii. 5. with 2 Cor. viii. 16.

[Where shall we find one from the beginning of the world to this hour, who ever served God but by a power derived immediately from God[i]? If any one think he have a power in himself to do good works, let him consult the tenth Article of our Church, which says, "The grace of God by Christ prevents us, that we may have a good will; and worketh with us when we have that good will." Or let him rather try what he can effect by any power of his own. Go, and get your soul filled with love to God; or with hatred of sin; or with a contempt for this present evil world and all that is in it: go, determine to do these things; and then carry them into effect: and then we will confess that what our Saviour has affirmed is not true. There is not any one, I apprehend, who will not acknowledge three things necessary to the salvation of his soul; namely, repentance, faith, and obedience. Go then, and repent with real contrition, and unfeigned self-lothing and self-abhorrence. Go, and work up your soul also to faith in Christ, so as to flee to him, and rely upon him, and cleave to him, and glory in him as all your salvation and all your desire. Go too, and get your whole soul cast into the mould of the Gospel, so as to delight in every part of God's revealed will, and to find all your happiness in the performance of it. Do any one of these things, and we will confess, either that the word of God is altogether false, or at least that it is so expressed, as to mislead every person who endeavours to understand it. But I will not require so much at your hands. Only go home from this place, and fall upon your knees in your secret chamber before God, and for one half hour pour out your soul before him in fervent supplications for mercy, and in devout thanksgivings for all the blessings of redemption as set before you in the Gospel. Put this matter to a trial: see whether you can effect even this small matter by any power of your own. I am not afraid to abide the test of this experiment, and to constitute this whole assembly judges in their own cause. If then not so much as one amongst you is able to do this small thing, know every one of you that the declaration in my text is true.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are yet without Christ—

[Truly, whilst you are "without Christ," you are "without any scriptural hope" of salvation[k]. Renounce therefore, I pray you, brethren, all confidence in yourselves. That you have brought forth fruit, I confess; but it has been "only wild grapes[l]." But it is a far different fruit that God looks for: and in order to bring forth that, you must be cut off from the stock on which you have hitherto grown, and be graffed into

[i] Hos. xiv. 8. [k] Eph. ii. 12. [l] Isai. v. 2—4.

Christ[m]. Seek then to become living branches of the living vine: seek an union with the Lord Jesus Christ by faith: so shall you be enabled to bring forth fruit to his glory, and be approved by the Great Husbandman in the day that he shall come to inspect his vineyard[n] — — —]

2. Those who by faith are united to him—

[Happy, happy are ye: for, as "those who are separate from him can do *nothing*," you, on the contrary, by virtue of your union with him can do *every thing;* as St. Paul has said, "I can do *all things* through Christ, who strengtheneth me[o]." In order to this however you must "abide in him," just as the branch abideth in the vine. You must be continually "receiving out of his fulness the grace" which your necessities require[p]. This life of faith is your wisdom, your happiness, your security[q]: and the more entire is your affiance in him, the more will you "be filled with all the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God."]

[m] Rom. xi. 24. [n] ver. 1, 2, 6, 8. [o] Phil. iv. 13.
[p] John i. 16. [q] Gal. ii. 20.

OUTLINE NO. 1692

FRUITFULNESS IN GOOD WORKS.

John xv. 8. *Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my Disciples.*

IT is not uncommon to hear those who preach or profess the Gospel spoken of as depreciating and disregarding good works. But this is nothing more than what the Gospel itself teaches us to expect: and, if we be not spoken of in a greater or less degree as undervaluing good works, there is reason to fear that we have not yet fully embraced that Gospel which Paul preached. We see it was the objection raised against him, when he proclaimed salvation by faith in Christ; and therefore he took frequent occasion to obviate it, and to shew that it had no real foundation. He abhorred the idea of such a consequence being deduced from the doctrines of grace, and therefore shuddered at the very mention of it: "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid! how shall we, who are dead to sin, live any longer

therein?" Yea, he affirms, that however salvation by faith alone may appear to ignorant or prejudiced minds to supersede the necessity of good works, it has directly the opposite tendency: "Do we then make void the law through faith?" says he; "yea, we establish the law." If the objectors understood aright the nature and office of faith, they would see that nothing but that would secure the performance of good works; since it is by that only that we are united to Christ; and it is only in virtue of that union that we can perform any good work whatever. But, in various other respects, also, is faith favourable to good works. To go no further than the text, we see in these few words two of the strongest inducements to Christian practice that can possibly be imagined; namely, that it conduces most eminently to the glory of God, and evidences most decisively the sincerity of our own souls.

Let fruitfulness in good works be considered then by us in both these points of view:

I. As glorifying God—

We are not to imagine that any act of ours can really add any thing to the Divine glory: for "our goodness, however it may benefit our fellow-creatures, can never extend to him[a]." But, as God is pleased frequently to speak of our conduct as reflecting glory upon him, we also may with propriety adopt that language, and say, that our fruitfulness in good works glorifies him; in that it shews,

1. The proper scope of his Gospel—

[His Gospel was never revealed for the mere purpose of informing our understandings in relation to mysteries which we could never otherwise have known: nor was it revealed for the mere purpose of saving man from perdition. It had a higher and nobler end in view: namely, the destroying of sin, and the restoring of sinners to the Divine image; "The grace of God, which bringeth salvation," was revealed to "teach us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live righteously, soberly, and godly, in this present world[b]." The gift of Christ as a Saviour was "to save us

[a] Ps. xvi. 2, 3. [b] Tit. ii. 11, 12.

from our sins[c];" delivering us from the present evil world; and purifying unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works[d]." The gift of the Holy Spirit, also, was "to convince us of the evil and bitterness of sin[e];" and to "sanctify us throughout, in body, soul, and spirit[f]." There is not a promise belonging to it which had not this direct aim in view, that, by laying hold of it, we might "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God[g]."

It is clear, therefore, that the Gospel, as being altogether designed to restore men to the Divine image, does and must reflect the highest glory on Him from whom it proceeds.]

2. The efficacy of his grace—

[Whatever we had been, even though we had been as perfect as when we first came out of our Creator's hands, the practice of universal holiness would have been honourable to Him from whom our powers had proceeded; but, considering what creatures we really are, how corrupt and sinful in all our parts, the change wrought in us displays the marvellous efficacy of God's grace. If a husbandman take good scions, and they all prove fruitful, his skill is displayed and honoured in the estimation of all who behold it. But, suppose he were to take none but dry and withered sticks, and to make all of them fruitful, his honour would be the more exalted, in that he should be able to educe fruits from dead sticks, which in themselves were incapable of producing any. Such honour is the Lord's when we dead and barren creatures are enabled to bring forth any fruit unto our God. Such "trees of righteousness of the Lord's planting" do indeed reflect the highest glory upon him[h].]

3. The blessedness of his salvation—

[Let any one behold a "wilderness made to blossom as the rose, and a desert to become, like Eden, the garden of the Lord;" then he will have some little idea of what is wrought upon the soul by the grace of Christ. See, on the day of Pentecost, the change wrought by a single discourse upon three thousand murderers, whose hands were yet reeking with the Saviour's blood: Was God not glorified in *that?* Or let us look amongst ourselves: Are there none of us, who, previous to our reception of the Gospel, were left to shew what was in our hearts, and to manifest that we were altogether "led captive by the devil at his will?" Compare those persons now with their former state of folly and wickedness; and

[c] Matt. i. 21. [d] Tit. ii. 14. [e] John xvi. 8.
[f] 1 Thess. v. 23. [g] 2 Cor. vii. 1. [h] Isai. lxi. 3.

will any one say that the change, though still very imperfect, reflects no glory on the Lord? Let the persons themselves judge: Are ye not happier now than in the days of your unregeneracy? Would ye willingly go back to your former state? Does not every day evince to you the blessedness of the change that has taken place? and can you forbear to honour Him who, by the mighty working of his power, has wrought it in you?]

But let us contemplate fruitfulness in that other view; namely,

II. As an evidence of our own sincerity—

Our blessed Lord told his Disciples, that "if they should continue in his word, then they should be his Disciples *indeed*[i]. In truth, fruitfulness in good works is that test of sincerity which is,

1. Exclusively admissible—

[All professions without this are vain: "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?" "Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." But if a person manifest a great zeal for divine ordinances, will not that suffice? No: God, speaking by the Prophet Isaiah, says of many of his professing people, "They seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinances of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God. Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge[k]?" Yet these people he proves to have been immersed in the vilest wickedness. By the Prophet Ezekiel, also, he describes the same kind of professors in very striking terms: "Son of man, the children of thy people speak one to another, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not[l]." Take the favourable part of this description, and you would suppose them all to be very eminent saints: but see the dark part of

[i] John viii. 31. [k] Isai. lviii. 2, 3. [l] Ezek. xxxiii. 30—32.

their character, and they are most detestable hypocrites. In the parable of the sower we have the same truth yet more fully delineated; for persons may bring forth fruit for a season, and prove apostates at last; yea, they may continue to bring forth fruit to the very end of life, and be found at last to have brought forth no such fruit as God will approve; the briers and thorns having so choked the corn, that "it brought forth no fruit to perfection[m]."

Hence it is clear, that nothing short of "a patient continuance in well-doing" can ever prove us to be truly upright before God. If we would be acknowledged by Christ as his, we must be "Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile."]

2. Universally sufficient—

[Shew me a fruitful Christian, and I inquire not to what Church he belongs, or what be the subordinate tenets of his creed. I know full well that nothing but an union with the Lord Jesus Christ can ever render a man fruitful in good works. Philosophy never could accomplish this; no, nor could the law of Moses, with all its precepts, and promises, and threatenings, effect it. An outward form of religion was all that the law could give: the Gospel alone could supply the power. Hence St. Paul says, "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin [did; that is, he] condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit[n]." "The law made nothing perfect; but the bringing in of a better hope did[o]." Yes, the Gospel sanctifies us throughout, in body, soul and spirit, and transforms us altogether into the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness: and that image, enstamped upon the soul, proves to demonstration whose we are. To ourselves it is "an evidence that we have passed from death unto life:" and "by it all others, also, know us to be Christ's Disciples."]

You will now be anxious to ASK,

1. What are those particular fruits, by which we are to judge of our state before God?

[It is not by any particular *class* of fruits, but by fruits of *every kind*, that we should judge of our state. There must be "no partiality" in God's law; "nor any hypocrisy," in preferring one part of it before another. In *all that relates to God*, we must be upright; humbling ourselves before him, embracing the salvation he has offered us in Christ Jesus, and devoting ourselves unreservedly to his service — — — In *all*

[m] Matt. xiii. 20—22. [n] Rom. viii. 3, 4. [o] Heb. vii. 11.

that relates to our neighbour, we must do unto him exactly as we, in a change of circumstances, should think it right for him to do unto us — — — In *all that relates to ourselves*, there must be a subjugation of our own passions, a government of our tempers, and an habitual exercise of all holy and heavenly affections — — — The whole circle of the Divine commandments must be our rule of duty; and superadded, as it were, to them must be the whole life of faith on the Son of God, and the whole life of love to him and to his people for his sake. In a word, see what were the fruits which the Vine itself, the Lord Jesus bare; and then you will see what is expected from the branches, and what will prove you to be vitally united to him. Set "Christ before you as an example, and follow his steps;" and you will need no other directory whereby to prove you are his Disciples.]

2. What encouragement have I to address myself to this laborious undertaking?

[If I were to say, that in so doing you will save your souls alive, I should speak what would be amply sufficient to encourage you. But what if I should say, that God would be glorified in you? Would you need more than *that*, to animate your endeavours? I do say it then, yes, and declare it most confidently, that in proportion as you are fruitful in good works, you will glorify your God. This is the uniform declaration of the inspired volume[p] — — — and on this is grounded that exhortation of our blessed Lord, "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven[q]."]

[p] Eph. ii. 10. [q] Matt. v. 16.

OUTLINE NO. 1693

THE FATHER'S LOVE TO CHRIST, AND CHRIST'S TO US.

John xv. 9. *As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.*

REASON could never suggest motives sufficient to counteract the passions: the law of God itself, with all its sanctions, could not change the heart. The Gospel alone can make sin odious, and holiness delightful. It effects this by revealing to us the love of Christ[a]. Hence our Lord reminds us of his love in order to confirm our love to him.

[a] 2 Cor. v. 14.

I. The nature and extent of Christ's love to us—

The comparison in the text denotes not equality, but resemblance[b]. The love of Christ to us, like that of his Father to him, is,

1. Without beginning—

There never was a period when the Father first began to love his Son—

[He loved him before his entrance on his ministry[c], before his existence in the world[d], before Isaiah's time[e], from all eternity[f].]

There never was a period when Christ first began to love us—

[His love is first *manifested* when we believe in him. But our faith in him is the effect, not the cause, of his love to us. This is affirmed by the prophets[g], and by Christ himself[h].]

2. Without measure—

The Father's love to Christ was unbounded—

[He is one with Christ in nature, and therefore in affection[i]. He has shewn the greatness of his love to him, in the gifts bestowed upon him[k], and in his constant co-operation with him[l].]

Christ's love to us is also boundless—

[It produces most astonishing acts of kindness towards us[m]. Human affections fall far short of it[n]. It "passess all knowledge," whether of men or angels.]

3. Without variation—

The Father's love to Christ was unchangeable—

[His love *seems* to have been withdrawn for a season[o]: he *seemed* not to answer his prayers[p]: but he heard him always[q], and loved him always. The apparent suspensions of

[b] Matt. v. 48. [c] Matt. iii. 17.
[d] John i. 18. [e] Isai. xlii. 1.
[f] In this sense many commentators explain Prov. viii. 22, 23, 30: and if that interpretation be admitted, the eternity of Christ's love may be confirmed by ver. 31. But, however this passage be interpreted, the fact itself stands on the most unquestionable authority. John xvii. 24.
[g] Jer. xxxi. 3. Ezek. xvi. 6. [h] John xv. 16.
[i] John x. 30. [k] John iii. 35. Col. i. 19. [l] John v. 19, 20.
[m] Eph. v. 25. Rev. i. 5, 6. [n] Isai. xlix. 15, 16.
[o] Matt. xxvii. 46. [p] Luke xxii. 42, 44. [q] John xi. 42.

his love were the necessary means of accomplishing the purposes of his love even towards Christ himself[r].]

Christ's love to us also is unchangeable—

[There are seasons when he *seems* to withdraw his love. But his chastisements are tokens of his love[s]. He hates sin indeed, and will correct his people till they put it away: but he will not withdraw his love from them[t]. Wherever he fixes his love, he rests unalterably in it[u].]

4. Without end—

The Father's love to Christ shall endure for ever—

[He has given him a pledge of this in his exaltation to heaven.]

Christ's love to us shall also be everlasting—

[He knows no change of mind with respect to what he has bestowed[x]. Whomsoever he loves he continues to love[y]. This truth is a just ground of joy and confidence[z].]

What returns can we ever make to Christ for such amazing love?

II. The duty resulting from it—

This part of the text requires APPLICATION rather than discussion—

It sets before us, not merely *our privilege* (which is, to continue in a sense of Christ's love to us) but *our duty;*

1. To love Christ—

[This would have been our duty, though he had not so loved us. But the obligation to it is greatly increased by his love. Let him then be exceeding precious to us. Let us despise every thing in comparison of him[a].]

2. To continue in love to him—

[We are too apt to decline in our love[b]. But declensions, however secret, are very offensive[c]. They will, if continued in, disqualify us for heaven[d]: they will reduce us to a worse situation than ever[e]. Let us therefore cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart[f].]

r Heb. ii. 10.
s Heb. xii. 6.
t Ps. lxxxix. 31—33.
u Zeph. iii. 17.
x Rom. xi. 29.
y John xiii. 1.
z Rom. viii. 35, 38, 39.
a Phil. iii. 8.
b Matt. xxiv. 12.
c Rev. ii. 4.
d Luke ix. 62.
e 2 Pet. ii. 22.
f Acts xi. 23.

3. To abound in all acts and offices of love to him—

[In secret, let us contemplate, admire, and adore his excellencies: in public, let us confess, honour, and obey him[g].]

It commends to us that duty as resulting from the declaration that precedes it—

[The love of Christ towards us is the strongest of all motives to the love of him. Was Christ's love to us so unmerited, unbounded, invariable, and lasting? and shall ours to him be weak and transient? Let it operate then suitably on all our hearts. Let us not rest satisfied with what we have attained[h]. Let us meditate on his love as the means of increasing ours[i].]

[g] Matt. x. 32. John xiv. 21. [h] Phil. iii. 12, 13. [i] Eph. iii. 18, 19.

OUTLINE NO. 1694

CHRISTIANITY INTENDED TO PROMOTE OUR HAPPINESS.

John xv. 11. *These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.*

THOUGH every possible perfection was exhibited in its brightest colours in the person of our Lord, yet the most striking feature of his character was benevolence. Like the sun in its course, he diffused blessings wherever he went, and laboured with indefatigable zeal to promote the good of mankind. By his discourses as well as by his miracles he sought to advance the happiness of his followers. In the passage before us he assures his Disciples that this was the one end of the instructions he had given them. That we may improve this gracious declaration, let us inquire,

I. What things he had spoken to them—

We do not apprehend that he refers to his discourses in general, but to the things which he had been just uttering—

The *doctrinal* part of what he had spoken related to their union with him—

[He illustrates their union with him by the similitude of a vine and its branches; and informs them that their fruitfulness in good works depended entirely upon their receiving of grace from him[a]. This is the most sublime, and the most important doctrine of our holy religion. It is, alas! too commonly overlooked, even by those who think themselves well versed in the truths of Christianity. It does not so much as enter into the mind of Christians in general. They have no idea what is meant by an union with the Lord Jesus Christ. They have some general notion that we are to be saved by him; but, in what *manner*, they know not. But this doctrine cannot be too attentively considered, seeing that it is the very corner-stone of our religion — — — the one means of procuring us an interest in Christ — — — and the only method by which we can derive any blessings from him — — —]

The *preceptive* part directed them how to secure the full advantages of that union—

[Some might possibly infer from the foregoing representation, that the Disciples of Christ were secure by virtue of their union with him, even though they should not exert themselves at all in the way of duty. He therefore cautions his Disciples against any such mistake. He bids them to "abide" in him by the continual exercise of faith, and to approve themselves to him by a diligent observance of his commandments[b]. These injunctions mark the duty of all his followers. If on the one hand we must not depend on ourselves, but receive continual supplies of grace out of his fulness; so neither on the other hand are we to be supine as though we had nothing to do. We must go to him in fervent prayer — — — rely upon him with unshaken affiance — — — and labour to serve him with our whole hearts — — —]

After having delivered these instructions our Lord condescended to declare,

II. For what end he spake them—

The slightest alteration in our translation of the text will both remove an appearance of tautology, and suggest some very important reflections[c]—

Our Lord desired to confirm the joy that he and his Disciples mutually communicated and received—

[Our Lord rejoiced exceedingly in his Disciples, even as

[a] ver. 1—6. [b] ver. 4, 10.

[c] Construe ἐν ὑμῖν with ἡ χαρὰ ἡ ἐμὴ — "My joy in you."

a bridegroom over his bride[d]. His delight in all his people is as great as language can possibly express[e]. As a mother forgets her pangs when she beholds her first-born, so is our Lord satisfied with the travail of his soul, when he beholds those whom he has redeemed with his blood[f]. The prospect of saving them was his great support when he endured all the shame and misery of crucifixion[g]. Now, if his Disciples should turn back from the faith, his soul can have no more pleasure in them[h]. But he is not willing to resign this happiness, and to feel all the painful sensations which their apostasy would occasion. He wept even over his blood-thirsty enemies: how much more would his soul be filled with anguish if any of his elect were left to perish! To guard effectually against this calamity, he shewed to his Disciples, and left on record for our instruction, both the privilege and the duty of all his followers; the privilege, to "abide in him;" the duty, to "obey his commandments."

As *he rejoices in his Disciples*, so do *they in him*. It is the most distinguishing feature of true "Christians, that they rejoice in Christ Jesus[i]." Some are so highly favoured that they rejoice in him with an unspeakable and glorified joy[k]. Nor would Jesus wish them ever to lose that joy. He would rather that what they now possess should be perfected in heaven. But, alas! how would it all vanish in an instant, if by any means they should be "moved from their steadfastness!" That they might never thus "cast away the rejoicing of their hope," but "hold it firm unto the end," and finally "obtain a full reward," he opened to them whatever might conduce to the comfort of their minds or the encouragement of their souls.]

His instructions were admirably calculated to promote this end—

[What could be more encouraging to his Disciples at that time, or indeed at any time, than to know that there was a fulness of grace treasured up for them in him? What more consoling than to know that they were united to him as branches to a vine? How trivial would they think any losses that they might sustain, or any trials they might endure, when they had such provision and security in Christ Jesus! The caution also that was given them would of necessity operate to make them watchful. Thus would they be preserved

[d] See the figurative representations, Luke xv. 4, 9, 24. but especially Isai. lxii. 5.

[e] Isai. lxv. 18, 19. Zeph. iii. 17.

[f] Isai. liii. 11.

[g] Heb. xii. 2.

[h] Heb. x. 38.

[i] Phil. iii. 3.

[k] 1 Pet. i. 8.

both from open and secret declensions, and "be to their Lord for a praise, and for an everlasting name that should not be cut off[l]."]

INFER—

1. How erroneous is the idea that religion tends to make us melancholy!

[A religious person may have a constitution that inclines to melancholy as well as any other person; or he may be rendered melancholy by mistaken views of religion. But let not the blame in either of these cases attach to religion. We are assured that the Gospel, so far from producing such an effect, is "glad tidings of great joy to all people"—it enjoins us all to "rejoice in the Lord always;" and, where it is best understood, and most experienced, namely, in heaven, the most exalted joy abounds universally without the smallest intermission. Let then this prejudice be for ever banished; and let Christians be careful so to walk in delightful fellowship with Jesus, as to shew to the world that his yoke is easy and his burthen light.]

2. How precious ought the Scriptures to be in our eyes!

[It is in them that Jesus, being dead, yet speaketh to us; and if we will attend to his instructions, they will "make us wise unto salvation." The intent of every word he there utters, is, to secure us to himself, and to make us eternally happy with himself in heaven. Why then do we not love the Scriptures more? Why do we give such a decided preference to books of human composition, yea, perhaps to plays, or novels, or the common publications of the day? Let us no longer treat with such indignity that sacred volume. "Let the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom[m];" and let us, like the prophet, eat it, that it may be the joy and rejoicing of our heart[n]. Especially let us regard what it speaks of our union with the living vine. Let us seek to be ingrafted into Christ; that, deriving sap and nourishment from him, we may be fitted for every good work, and bring forth fruit unto life eternal.]

[l] Isai. lv. 13. [m] Col. iii. 16. [n] Jer. xv. 16.

OUTLINE NO. 1695

LOVE TO THE BRETHREN.

John xv. 12. *This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.*

THE law and the Gospel are in perfect unison with each other: the law, *as a covenant*, sends us to the

Gospel, that we may obtain mercy with God; and the Gospel sends us back again to the law, *as a rule of life*, that, by obeying its commands, we may honour and glorify our God. The loving our neighbour as ourselves was enjoined by the law, and indeed was a summary of all the duties of the second table[a]. Our blessed Lord, enjoining the same duty from new considerations, calls it "a new commandment," and emphatically *his* commandment; that so we may be led to examine it with stricter attention, and to regard it with deeper reverence: he says, in effect, Labour constantly to fulfil that old commandment of the law; and, that you may never want either a directory to guide, or a motive to animate you in your exertions, take my love to you as the *reason* and *pattern* of your love to each other.

To elucidate his words, we shall shew,

I. How Christ has loved us—

We must, of course, content ourselves with a few hints only of a subject, which has a height and depth, and length and breadth that can never be comprehended, never explored. Consider then the love of Christ to us:

1. How free!

[Who ever did any thing to procure it? It exerted itself towards us long before we had any existence in the world. Who can do any thing *now* to merit it? We deserve to forfeit it every day and hour; but to earn an interest in it is beyond the power of man. We have nothing of our own but sin; and that would be a strange price to pay for the love of Christ. Indeed, if we deny the freeness of his grace, we rob him of the brightest jewel in his crown.]

2. How tender!

[There is not one of his people, however weak and afflicted, whom he does not watch over with more than parental tenderness, "carrying the lambs in his bosom, and gently leading them that are with young." Yes; "we have not an High-priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities:" "in all our afflictions He is afflicted:" if we are stricken by the hand of persecution, He feels the blow[b]: "Whoso

[a] Compare Lev. xix. 18. with Rom. xiii. 8—10. and Gal. v. 14.
[b] Acts ix. 4.

toucheth us, toucheth the apple of his eye." In every possible state he sympathizes with us, as a head with the members; and never fails to succour us with "grace sufficient for us."]

3. How abundant!

[If we regarded only the temporal blessings we receive at his hands, we must confess his love to us to be very abundant. But who can contemplate his unwearied intercessions at the right hand of his Father, or the incessant communications of his Spirit to their souls, and not stand amazed at the exceeding riches of his grace and love? And besides all this, he is "preparing mansions for us in his Father's house," and training us up daily, that we may be counted worthy to inhabit them for ever and ever. Well is his love represented as "passing knowledge[c]!"]

4. How costly!

[Free as his love was to us, it was not exercised by him but at an expense that exceeds all calculation. Before it could operate for our advantage, he must leave his heavenly glory, assume our fallen nature, endure the scoffs and insults of his own creatures, and "pour out his soul unto death" as a sacrifice for sin. And would he pay this amazing price, in order to redeem our souls from death and hell? Yes, he undertook and executed the mighty work; and never drew back till he could say, "It is finished."]

From contemplating this stupendous mystery, let us proceed to inquire,

II. In what respects his love to us is a pattern for our love to each other—

The love which the saints should bear to each other is of a sublime nature, very different from that which they owe to the world around them[d]. To resemble that of Christ to us, it should be,

1. Disinterested—

[Our love to the saints should not be confined to those of the same Church or party, nor should it have respect to any pleasure or advantage that we expect to derive from them; for this is only a refined species of self-love[e]: it should respect them only as children of our heavenly Father, as members of Christ our living Head, and as joint-heirs of the same eternal

[c] Eph. iii. 19.

[d] The two are carefully distinguished from each other. Gal. vi. 10. 1 Pet. ii. 17.

[e] Matt. v. 46, 47.

glory. It should be proportioned to their piety, rather than to any other endowments; and be occupied in advancing their happiness, not only as much as our own, but oftentimes in preference to our own. It was thus that the love of Christ operated towards us; and it is proposed for our imitation more especially in this point of view; "Mind not every one his own things, but every one also the things of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus[f]."]

2. Sympathizing—

[We are all passing through a vale of tears, "born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." Hence we need each other's care and assistance through the whole of our lives. The kindness of friendship is a remedy which God has put within our reach, to enhance our joys and to alleviate our sorrows: we should therefore enter into the concerns of others, and feel them as our own; "weeping with them that weep, and rejoicing with them that rejoice." By this we are told, we shall more especially comply with the injunction in the text; "Bear ye one another's burthens," says the Apostle, "and *so* fulfil the law of Christ[g]."]

3. Beneficent—

[Love must not interest merely the feelings of the mind: it must exert itself in acts correspondent to the occasions on which it is exercised. Is our neighbour distressed? we must relieve him. Is he ignorant? we must instruct him. Is he weak? we must strengthen him. Is he fallen? we must raise him up. Has he shewn some infirmities? we must bear with him. Has he offended us? we must forgive him. Are there any opportunities whatever of doing him good? we must gladly and speedily embrace them. It is in this way also that the Apostle urges us to imitate our Lord and Saviour: "Put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another; *even as Christ forgave you*, so also do ye[h]."]

4. Self-denying—

[That love which will exert itself only in things that are easy and pleasing to oneself, is not worthy the name of love. A truly Christian affection will lead one to "condescend to men of low estate;" to visit the chambers of the sick; to enter into the dungeon of the prisoner; to cut off some of one's superfluities, in order to supply the necessities of others; to do good in return for evil; to expose oneself to the derision of a thought-

[f] Phil. ii. 4, 5. [g] Gal. vi. 2. [h] Col. iii. 12, 13

less world, in order to be instrumental in turning some of them from the evil of their ways; and "to lay down, if need be, even our own lives for the brethren." This was the way in which St. Paul manifested his love[i]; and in which we also, after the example of our Lord, are called to manifest ours[k]."]

This being the way in which our love may resemble his, we shall shew you,

III. The obligation we are under to follow that pattern—

Our blessed Lord has enjoined a conformity to him in these respects,

1. As an act of obedience to him—

[He does not *recommend* such love as decorous and beneficial, but *commands* it as a duty which he will on no account dispense with. He stamps his own authority upon it; intimating thereby, that he will make it a subject of particular inquiry in the day of judgment. Indeed the decision at the last day is represented as turning principally upon this point; they who for his sake have abounded in offices of love being made *exclusively* the objects of his favour, while they who have neglected them are marked as objects of his indignation and abhorrence. If therefore we have any regard to his authority, or any dread of his everlasting displeasure, we must see the importance of following the example of his love.]

2. As an evidence of our love to him—

[Having in another place enforced this duty in terms similar to the text, he adds, that the exercise of brotherly love is the distinctive badge of our profession, the habit whereby all his followers must be known[l]." To the same effect his loving and beloved Disciple also speaks, declaring that our profession of love to God is mere hypocrisy without this[m]; and that without this we can have no assurance, no evidence, that we have passed from death unto life[n]. Shall we then at once write '*Hypocrite*' upon our foreheads? Shall we be contented to be ranked with "murderers, who certainly have not eternal life abiding in them[o]?" If not, we must see the necessity of imitating Christ, who "has left us an example that we should follow his steps."]

INFER—

1. How little of true religion is there in the world!

[i] Phil. ii. 17, 18. [k] 1 John iii. 16. [l] John xiii. 34, 35.
[m] 1 John iv. 20. [n] 1 John iii. 14, 17, 19. [o] 1 John iii. 15.

[So far is love to the saints from being the common disposition of mankind, that almost all are rather filled with hatred against them: and where candour prevails over the enmity of the human heart so as to subdue its workings, there yet is a total want of that disinterested, sympathizing, beneficent, and self-denying love, which characterizes a true Christian — — —]

2. What reason have even the saints themselves to be ashamed before God!

[Let the most zealous and active Christian compare his love with that of Christ; how poor and defective will his best efforts appear! Alas! alas! how often are things found among professing Christians that are not only defective, but directly contrary to love! Beloved brethren, let us study more carefully St. Paul's description of love[p]: and above all, let us contemplate more the love of Christ to us: so shall we feel its constraining influence, and be stimulated to the exercise of this delightful duty.]

[p] 1 Cor. xiii.

OUTLINE NO. 1696

CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS HIS FRIENDS.

John xv. 15. *Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you*[a].

KNOWLEDGE of every kind is excellent and useful; but that of religion far transcends all other. Hence we are commanded to pay a peculiar respect to those who labour in the word and doctrine[b]. Hence also our Lord himself, having revealed to his Disciples the whole will of God, adduces his fidelity in this respect as one of the strongest tokens of his affection for them.

I. In what light Christ regards his followers—

The state of believers under the Gospel differs widely from that of those under the Mosaic dispensa-

[a] See another Discourse on this text, made to illustrate a part of Claude's Essay. Claude, p. 43, in the fifth and *improved* edition.
[b] 1 Thess. v. 12.

tion. *They* were in the condition of servants, but *we* of friends. Christ assures us that from "henceforth" his people should be regarded by him in that light.

He has taken away from us the yoke of the ceremonial law—

[This was an exceedingly heavy burthen[c]; but Christ has delivered his people from it[d]. He has imposed only two rites, and those easy and instructive[e]: his service is perfect freedom[f].]

He has delivered us from a sense of guilt—

[The offerings of a Jew afforded no assurance that God had accepted him[g]; they were rather so many remembrances of his sin[h]: but Christ has freed *us* from the pains of a guilty conscience[i].]

He has set us at liberty also from a servile spirit—

[The Jews could not enter into the most holy place; none could go there but the high-priest, and he only on one day in the year, and then not without blood[k]: but now all believers are priests[l]. The vail which separated the most holy place was rent at the death of Christ[m]: all therefore may enter thither without fear[n].]

He has put us into the state of adult sons—

[Believers under the law were like minors, or children under age[o]; but *we* are brought to the full possession of our privileges[p].]

Our Lord proceeds to prove his assertion:

II. What evidence we have that he does so regard us—

He still carries on the comparison between servants and friends. He points out one particular wherein he has eminently distinguished us, and exalted us above all the Jewish saints.

He has revealed to us the perfections of God—

[These were but little known to the Jews; but Christ has

[c] Acts xv. 10. [d] Gal. v. 1. [e] Baptism and the Lord's Supper.
[f] 1 John v. 3. Matt. xi. 30. [g] Heb. ix. 9. [h] Heb. x. 1—3.
[i] Heb. x. 14. [k] Heb. ix. 7. [l] Rev. i. 6.
[m] It was rent in twain from the top to the bottom at the very time of the evening sacrifice, by means of which it was opened to the view of all the worshippers in the temple.
[n] Heb. x. 19—22. [o] Gal. iv. 1—3. [p] Gal. iv. 6, 7.

more clearly revealed them. He has declared them to us in his discourses[q]: he has exhibited them in his life[r].]

He has shewn us the way of acceptance with him—

[This was but obscurely shadowed under the law. Many even rested in the ceremonies themselves; but Christ has plainly declared *himself* to be the way to the Father[s]. He has expressly told us that we have acceptance through *his* blood[t].]

He has unfolded to us the privileges of God's people—

[The Jews were encouraged by temporal promises; but "life and immortality are brought to light by the Gospel." Christ has fully opened to us our present privileges[u], and our future prospects[x].]

He has "made known all which he himself had heard of the Father"—

[At that time he had not absolutely revealed *all*[y]: but he had declared all which he had been commissioned to reveal, or was necessary for them to know; and he completed his revelation soon afterwards.]

This was a most undeniable evidence of his friendship—

[Servants are not admitted to the secret views and designs of their masters; but Christ has made known to us all the mysteries of his Father's counsels[z]. What abundant evidence of his friendship does this afford!]

INFER—

1. How should we esteem the Holy Scriptures!

[It is by the Scriptures that Christ declares to us the Father's will. In them therefore we see the strongest testimony of his love. The written memorials even of a creature's love are dear to us. Of what inestimable value then should we account the word of Christ! Let us regard it with the same affection as David did[a]: let it "dwell richly in us in all wisdom[b]."]

2. What love and honour should we shew to Christ!

[We should not consider him *merely* as a lord and master: we should rather view him as our dearest friend. Let us then delight ourselves in communion with him: let us open to him all our cares, wants, fears, &c.: let us give him that best proof of our regard, a willing and unreserved obedience[c].]

[q] John i. 18. [r] Heb. i. 3. [s] John xiv. 6.
[t] Matt. xx. 28. and xxvi. 28. [u] John xiv. 23.
[x] John xvii. 24. [y] John xvi. 12. [z] Col. i. 26, 27.
[a] Ps. xix. 10. [b] Col. iii. 16. [c] John xv. 14.

OUTLINE NO. 1697

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION EXPLAINED.

John xv. 16. *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.*

IT is of great importance to have a just view of the doctrines contained in Scripture. There are many passages which at first sight appear to contradict each other; but they are all true and consistent when properly explained. The assertions respecting the freedom of our will, and our proneness to apostasy, are true, and necessary to excite us to care and watchfulness: nor are those that respect our election of God, and our assured perseverance in his ways, less true, or less conducive to our spiritual welfare. They have a strong tendency to produce in us humility and a dependence on God. All these passages therefore ought to be insisted on in their season. That which now demands our attention is a part of our Lord's farewell address to his Disciples. It naturally leads us to consider,

I. The doctrine of election—

This being frequently misrepresented, it will be proper to state what we mean by the doctrine of election—

[It imports, that "*that we have not chosen God.*" No man by nature does choose him. The carnal mind is enmity against him[a], and prefers the vanities of time and sense before him: nor is any man ever brought to choose him without having discovered much reluctance, and been overcome by the constraining influence of Divine grace[b]. It imports, moreover, that "*God has chosen us.*" He from eternity chose some to life. This choice of his was free and sovereign, without any respect whatever to works either done, or to be done, by us. In due time, God manifests his election, by sending his grace into our hearts: nor does any man differ from another, but in consequence of grace thus derived from God[c]. Hence every saint on earth or in heaven must say, "By the grace of God I am what I am[d]."]

[a] Rom. viii. 7. [b] Ps. cx. 3. [c] 1 Cor. iv. 7. [d] 1 Cor. xv. 10.

The doctrine thus stated is capable of the fullest proof,

1. From reason—

[God is a Being of infinite perfection. But he could not be independent if the accomplishment of his purposes depended on our free-will; nor omniscient, if he did not know how we should act; nor immutable, because his knowledge must increase with a succession of events[e]. Again, It is ordained, that man shall never have whereof to boast before God[f]. But if the doctrine of election be not true, man may boast that he has made himself to differ[g]. Again, Jesus Christ must have a seed to serve him. But if none are elected of God, it *may* happen that none will choose God; and thus Christ *may* have shed his blood in vain.]

2. From Scripture—

[In *the Old Testament* we find that God had a peculiar people, and that some from among them were chosen by him to particular stations[h]. Nor can any argument be brought against God's election of men to eternal life, which will not be equally valid against the right he has confessedly exercised in choosing them to the enjoyment of the means of grace. *In the New Testament*, we are plainly told that some of the Jews were chosen to special and saving mercies[i]: they were called *in time*, in consequence of having been predestinated *from eternity*[k]. God had no respect to any works of theirs, either done by them, or foreseen by him; but simply to his own eternal purpose[l]. St. Paul not only argues this point at large, but, conceiving that he has fully established it, he lays it down as an incontrovertible truth, that the salvation of every man is entirely owing to the grace and mercy of God[m].]

3. From experience—

[Whence is it that so small a part of the world is evangelized? or that the persons who, according to human appearance, are least likely to receive the Gospel, are still, as in the early ages, the first to embrace it? Whence is it too that

[e] It is not sufficient to say that He foresees every thing, though he has not fore-ordained it; for if things be uncertain, they cannot be foreseen; and if they be certain, they cannot but be fore-ordained, since the certain operation of every distinct cause must be traced up to the first great Cause of all.

[f] Rom. iii. 27. 1 Cor. i. 31.

[g] Contrary to 1 Cor. iv. 7. before quoted.

[h] Levi to the priesthood, David to the throne, &c.

[i] Rom. xi. 5, 7. [k] Rom. viii. 30. [l] 2 Tim. i. 9.

[m] Rom. ix. 16.

all the godly, not excepting even those who are most prejudiced against the word Election, are yet ready to ascribe their own salvation to the unmerited grace of God? These things strongly corroborate the testimonies of reason and Scripture; and though there are difficulties attending this doctrine, yet are there much greater difficulties attending the denial of it. And since God has affirmed it to be true, we should say to all objectors, Who art thou that repliest against God[n]?]

The principal objection against this doctrine will be obviated, if we consider,

II. The ends to which we are elected—

There is no reason to think this doctrine injurious to morality. Indeed there is no other doctrine that secures morality on so firm a basis—

1. We are chosen expressly to good works—

[Our Lord might refer in part to the labours of his Disciples, and to their consequent success in them. But he certainly had a further view also to the fruits of righteousness which they should bring forth. In this sense his words are applicable to all believers. God has ordained holiness as the way to heaven[o] — — — and has appointed the means no less than the end[p] — — — yea, he has decreed the end to be obtained only in and by the means[q] — — — Hence the performance of good works is secured by that same decree which secures the salvation of God's elect.]

2. We are chosen also to persevere in them—

[God does not leave us at liberty to return to sin: on the contrary, he will have no pleasure in those who do[r]. He will regard all the righteousness which they have wrought as though it had never been[s]: and their latter end will be worse than their beginning[t]. But against such apostasy God will secure his own elect. He has given them a new heart, that they may fear him *for ever*[u]. He has promised, that their path shall be steadfast[x], and progressive[y]. And every saint may indulge a humble confidence that it will be so[z].]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who object to this doctrine—

[For argument sake, we will give up the doctrine, and

[n] Rom. ix. 20. [o] Heb. xii. 14. Eph. ii. 10. Rom. viii. 29.
[p] 1 Pet. i. 2. Eph. i. 4. [q] 2 Thess. ii. 13.
[r] Heb. x. 38. [s] Ezek. xviii. 24. [t] 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.
[u] Jer. xxxii. 39. [x] Job xvii. 9. [y] Prov. iv. 18.
[z] Phil. i. 6.

allow the first choice to arise from ourselves. Have ye then chosen Christ? Have ye chosen him as your almighty Saviour and your rightful Lord? If you think you have, consider how much is implied in such a choice. If you acknowledge you have not, "out of your own mouth shall ye be judged."]

2. Those who doubt their own election—

[You are too apt to perplex yourselves with unprofitable inquiries. You should rather examine whether ye have been called. It is by your vocation that you are to know your election[a]. Keep your evidences of conversion clear, and they will be indisputable proofs that you have been chosen to life.]

3. Those who have good reason to hope that they have been elected of God—

[Never can you sufficiently admire the goodness of God to you. Well may you say, Why was *I* taken, while so many better than myself were left? But at the same time remember to what ye are chosen. Never attempt to separate the end from the means. If ye have this hope, ye are bound to purify yourselves, even as God is pure[b].]

[a] 1 Thess. i. 4, 5. [b] 1 John iii. 3.

OUTLINE NO. 1698

CONSOLATION TO THE PERSECUTED.

John xv. 18—20. *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep your's also.*

WELL might our Lord enjoin his Disciples to love one another; for, if they be not united in affection towards each other, they will in vain look for any love in the world. They are "as sheep in the midst of wolves:" the wolves indeed are kept from devouring now, as they have done in former times; but the disposition to devour still remains in the minds of ungodly men, and the godly are still regarded as their legitimate prey[a]. Our Lord may be considered

[a] Isai. lix. 15.

as addressing his own immediate Disciples in the first place: but the grounds on which he teaches them to expect hatred from the world, are such as apply equally to all his people in every age; and consequently we may consider the words as addressed to all his followers.

We shall take occasion from them to consider,

I. What it is in Christians that calls forth the enmity of the world—

The reasons usually assigned are, that they are enthusiasts, and hypocrites, and disturbers of the peace of mankind: but the true reasons are those which our Lord assigns in the text, namely,

1. Their election out of the world—

[" The whole world lieth in wickedness," all being equally alienated from God, however they may differ from each other in their moral conduct. But God has from eternity chosen a people, whom he has given to his dear Son, and whom in due time he calls by his grace, and brings out of nature's " darkness into the marvellous light" of his Gospel. These, when called, are made sensible that they owe the change, not to any merit or power in themselves, but altogether to the effectual working of his grace: and they acknowledge thankfully their obligations to him, saying, " By the grace of God I am what I am[b]."

This acknowledgment is very offensive to the world. They cannot endure to hear of the sovereignty of God: they think that God cannot choose some to be objects of his favour without being unjust to others. Though they cannot but see that God has exercised his sovereignty in every age, in the case of Abraham, for instance, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, and of the Jewish nation, and of those nations that now enjoy the light of his Gospel, yea, in the redemption of fallen man when he never provided such a remedy for the fallen angels, yet they will not allow him to do so now: and every person who ascribes his conversion to the distinguishing grace of God, they consider as actuated by consummate pride; when, in fact, the doctrine of election is the most humiliating that can be imagined, and the denial of it is the fruit of ignorance and presumption — — —

That this is a principal ground of men's enmity against the people of God is asserted by our Lord: and it is confirmed by every part of the sacred records. Why did Cain hate Abel,

[b] See 2 Tim. i. 9. Rom. xi. 5.

but for the distinguishing favour shewn him by God[c]? In like manner Esau hated Jacob, not merely for the manner in which he had gained the blessing, but because the birthright was transferred to him. Thus Saul hated David also, because he saw that God was with him: and the Jews sought to destroy our Lord for no other reason than because he had brought to their recollection some instances wherein God had imparted to Gentiles favours which he had withheld from his own peculiar people[d].]

2. Their separation from the world—

[When once the Christian sees the sin and danger of a carnal life, he will of necessity depart from it. He not only desires to obey the command which says, "Come out from among them and be separate," but he perceives, that, with his new views and principles, he can no more maintain communion with the world than light can with darkness, or Christ with Belial[e]. Hence he no longer walks in "the broad road that leadeth to destruction, but in the narrow path that leadeth unto life."

This is another great occasion of offence to the ungodly world; for in departing from the pursuits and vanities of the world, the Christian does, in effect, declare the danger of those who still adhere to them; just as "Noah condemned the world" by building the ark, and Lot condemned Sodom by fleeing from it[f]. "Those who are of the world, the world will approve and love;" because their spirit and conduct have a direct tendency to justify the world in all its proceedings: but "those who, like their Lord, are not of the world," and refuse to be conformed to its maxims and ways, will assuredly become objects of the world's displeasure; for though their testimony be never audibly delivered, it will be seen and felt; and every effort will be made on the part of the world to bring back those who have deserted its standard and enlisted themselves under the banners of the Lord Jesus[g].]

That there is, however, no cause for alarm, will appear, if we consider,

II. What are those considerations which Christ has suggested for their support—

We confine ourselves to those mentioned in the text—

1. Our Lord himself was so treated—

[c] Gen. iv. 4, 5. 1 John iii. 12.
[d] Luke iv. 25—29.
[e] 2 Cor. vi. 14—17.
[f] Prov. xxviii. 4.
[g] Ps. xxxviii. 20. Gal. iv. 29.

[For the truth of this he appeals to his own Disciples: they had seen how justly he was characterized by the prophet, as "one whom man despised, and whom the nation abhorred[h]." They had seen how ill he had been treated, notwithstanding his unerring wisdom, his spotless piety, his unbounded benevolence.

Now, if He, *our Head and Chief*, was so hated by an ungodly world, how can *we* hope to escape their enmity? We have in him an indisputable proof, that no wisdom, no prudence, no perfection of character, can enable us to obtain the approbation of worldly men: on the contrary, the more entirely we resemble him, the more shall we be hated by his enemies.

And may we not find in this abundant consolation? If we were not so treated, we should have reason to doubt whether we were "walking as he walked:" but if we are reviled and persecuted as he was, then have we an evidence that we belong to him; and we have reason to "rejoice, inasmuch as we are partakers of his sufferings[i]."]

2. He has forewarned us to expect no other treatment than that which he himself received—

[We might well suppose, that, if HE was so treated, *we* should meet with similar treatment: for reason itself teaches us that the servant ought not to expect a better reception than his lord. But our Saviour himself also has told us this[k], and particularly calls upon us to "remember" his words. Indeed, if we only remembered what he has spoken to us, we should never be surprised at any thing that we meet with; seeing that he has so plainly forewarned us of it. He has even told us, that the persecutions we meet with shall "turn *unto* us for a testimony." Being then forewarned, we should be forearmed. This was the consideration with which St. Paul endeavoured to comfort the Thessalonians, when they were startled at the greatness and multitude of his afflictions[l]: and, in truth, if the Scriptures be fulfilled in us, as they were in Christ, we may well be reconciled to whatever an ungodly world may inflict upon us.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are afraid of incurring the hatred of the world—

[Doubtless the hatred of the world is not to be desired: we should rather, if it could be, that they should love us: but, if the friendship of the world be incompatible with fidelity to

[h] Isai. xlix. 7.
[i] 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13.
[k] Matt. x. 22—26
[l] 1 Thess. iii. 4.

God[m], then may we very cheerfully forego it. If we be apprehensive of consequences, what is there to fear[n]? Man, at the utmost, can only kill the body; whereas God can kill the soul: and therefore God only and exclusively should be the object of our fear[o].]

2. Those who have braved and borne the enmity of the world—

[Do you repent of what you have done? Has not God made up to you all that you ever suffered for his sake? Do you think that you will ever feel regret, when you come to heaven, that you suffered so much in your way thither? Are you not even ashamed that you ever for a moment accounted the cross of Christ heavy, or that you groaned under its weight? Sure I am, that "you shall receive an hundredfold even in this life, *with persecutions;*" and that one moment's enjoyment of your Saviour's presence will abundantly repay all that you endured for his sake. Be not careful then what men may do against you: only seek to cut off occasion from those who seek occasion; and determine through grace, that they "shall find no occasion against you, except concerning the law of your God."]

[m] Jam. iv. 4. [n] Isai. li. 12, 13. [o] Luke xii. 4, 5.

OUTLINE NO. 1699

THE GREAT SIN OF REJECTING CHRIST.

John xv. 22. *If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin.*

EVERY sin is committed against an infinitely good and gracious God: yet the stoical doctrine of the equality of sins is not therefore true. Guilt may be aggravated or diminished by a variety of circumstances. Hence our Lord denounced peculiar woe against Chorazin and Bethsaida. To the same effect he speaks concerning the Jews in the text.

I. How greatly aggravated the sin of the Jews was in rejecting Christ—

Sin admits of so many degrees of malignity, that one may be considered as no sin in comparison of another; not that any man can be absolutely without

sin[a], nor is any man really excusable in the sight of God[b]; but *comparatively* some may be said to "have no sin[c]." Thus it was with those of whom our Lord spake. If he had not come to them, they might have pleaded a want of the necessary means of salvation: but our Lord's preaching rendered them wholly inexcusable. They could not plead any want of

Instruction—

[Our Lord often spake in parables. This was the means of inflicting judicial blindness on the proud[d]; but it was well calculated for the instruction of the humble. Besides, he delivered many things in the simplest terms.]

Evidence—

[Our Lord wrought many and stupendous miracles. He performed them by a touch, a word, and even at a distance. His miracles were as benevolent as they were open and undeniable. Those who wished to discredit them, imputed them to the agency of Satan. Our Lord mentions them as aggravating the guilt of those who rejected him[e].]

Warning—

[There was no want of fidelity on our Lord's part. He warned the people in the plainest and most awful manner[f].]

Encouragement—

[Every one that thirsted for his benefits was invited by him[g]. He offered to give *spiritual* life to all who would come to him[h]. He promised also to crown them with eternal happiness and glory[i].]

If *they* were thus without excuse, it becomes us to consider,

II. How much more inexcusable we are if we reject him—

Christ has come and preached to us by his word and ministers, and many reject him after the example of the unbelieving Jews. Though we be not avowed infidels, we *practically* reject Christ, when we do not receive him for all the ends and purposes for which he was sent; and if we do so, our guilt is peculiarly aggravated.

[a] 1 John. i. 8. [b] Rom. i. 19—21. [c] John ix. 41.
[d] Luke viii. 10. [e] ver. 24. [f] John viii. 21, 24.
[g] Rev. xxii. 17. [h] John vii. 37, 38. [i] John xii. 26.

We have not any Jewish prejudices to encounter—

[The Jews had received their law from God; they had been accustomed to expect a temporal Messiah, yet they saw a man altogether destitute and despised, and beheld the law of Moses superseded by a new religion. His works indeed should have obviated all these difficulties: but we have not these difficulties to contend with. We profess that the Gospel is from God. We profess that Christ's kingdom is of a spiritual nature. We profess that his cross is his own glory, and his Church's hope.]

We see the whole design of God unfolded—

[The Jews had only partial and contracted views: they could not reconcile many seeming contrarieties. The Disciples, even after Christ's resurrection, were at a loss to account for the occurrences they had seen[k]. But we behold the counsels of God completed; the various prophecies are all accomplished; the characters and offices of Christ are opened; the great ends of his incarnation and death are effected; the glory of God, as shining in his face, is fully displayed.]

We have witnessed the success of the Gospel—

[Those to whom our Lord spake, saw his ministry despised: the great and learned of their nation rejected him. His followers were only a few, and those of the lowest class: but we have seen the "grain of mustard become a large tree:" the Gospel has spread to the remotest corners of the earth; it has triumphed over the prejudices and passions, the interests and powers, of the world; its influence is yet daily exhibited before our eyes.]

How heinous then must be our guilt if we reject him! Surely our "sin must be of a crimson or a scarlet die."

ADDRESS—

1. Those who make excuses for their neglect of Christ—

[With what foolish and weak excuses do men deceive themselves[l]! Surely God will not be deceived by these.

[k] Luke xxiv. 21.

[l] We may notice a few: "I have not time." For what is time given?—"I am not able." Do you do what you can?—"It is time enough yet." Shall you certainly live, and have the grace you now slight offered you again?—"I have the majority on my side." Are you not then in the *broad* road? and will associates mitigate your pain?—"Professors are hypocrites." Is that a reason *you* should not be sincere?—"God is merciful." To whom? the *impenitent?*

What cloak for your sin will you find when he shall call you to account? Will you plead a want of instruction, evidence, warning, or encouragement? Know that in that day you will be speechless[m]. Your love of sin and hatred of the light are the true causes of your rejecting Christ[n], and this will be the ground of a more aggravated condemnation[o].]

2. Those who desire to attain the saving knowledge of him—

[It is a great mercy to have such a desire formed in the heart; but beware of cloking or extenuating your sin. Remember that awful yet encouraging declaration[p]— Confess your sin with all its aggravations. There is a virtue in the blood of Jesus to cleanse you from it all[q].]

[m] Matt. xxii. 12. [n] John v. 40. [o] John iii. 19.
[p] Prov. xxviii. 13. [q] 1 John i. 7.

OUTLINE NO. 1700

HATRED OF CHRIST IS HATRED OF THE FATHER.

John xv. 23. *He that hateth me hateth my Father also.*

MEN are ever disposed to palliate their sins, and, by representing them under some specious name, to conceal their real enormity; but God calls every sin by its proper name, and speaks of it with just abhorrence. Covetousness in his eyes is not prudence, but idolatry[a]: a disregard of his presence is not mere inadvertence, but a denial of his most essential attributes[b]: and a contempt of his Gospel is not a venial ignorance or inattention, but an absolute hatred both of Christ and of the Father. To confirm this truth we will endeavour to shew,

I. Who they are that hate Christ—

It may be thought that none but Jews can be guilty of hating Christ, and that the bearing of his name is a sufficient testimony of our regard for him. But there are too many who, notwithstanding they have been baptized into his name, are yet "enemies to him in their minds." Certainly we must number among his enemies

[a] Eph. v. 5. [b] Ps. x. 11, 13.

1. Those who disregard his Gospel—

[The Gospel of Christ ought to be universally received as "glad tidings of great joy:" but the greater part of mankind feel an aversion to it. Some dislike its fundamental doctrine of salvation by faith, and represent it as injurious to the interests of morality. Others hate the duties it enjoins, and traduce it as requiring a state of mind totally incompatible with the discharge of our offices in social and civil life. Many even of those who approve of the Gospel in their judgment, are yet very far from experiencing its power in their souls. They enjoy not its promises, they fulfil not its precepts, they know not its renovating, sanctifying effects. It may be asked, Are all these persons haters of Christ? Let Christ himself answer that question. He states, that a practical renunciation of his authority is a proof, that they are enemies to him in their hearts, and will cause them to be treated as his enemies in the day that he shall judge the world[c].]

2. Those who neglect his ordinances—

[Our Lord has promised his peculiar presence to us while we seek him in the ordinances of his own appointment. Should not then the hope of enjoying his presence endear the ordinances to us, and make us regard them as our most inestimable privilege? But how are they regarded by the generality amongst us? Does not worldly business or pleasure often detain us needlessly from the house of God? And when we are assembled for worship, do not our thoughts rove to the very ends of the earth, so that, though we "draw nigh to God with our lips, our hearts are far from him?" Are not almost all persons cold and remiss in secret prayer? And is not family religion either banished altogether, or conducted with such formality as to render it irksome and unprofitable? Our Lord left it as his dying command that we should often partake of bread and wine in remembrance of his body broken and his blood shed for us. Yet is not his table either shamefully deserted, or else profaned by impenitent, unsanctified communicants? And what construction must we put on such conduct? Our Lord plainly tells us, that he considers them as his enemies, and that none of those who thus despise his invitations, shall ever taste of his supper[d].]

3. Those who persecute his people—

[Persecution is not carried now to the same extent that it has been in former ages. But has it ceased? Experience proves that there is the same enmity in the hearts of men against the faithful servants of God as ever there was. There

[c] Luke xix. 14, 27. [d] Luke xiv. 18, 24.

are many at this day who are true descendants of Cain and Ishmael; and, as long as there shall be an unconverted man upon earth, it will be found, that they, who are born after the flesh, will persecute those who are born after the Spirit[e]. If they do not kill the saints, they will "revile them, and separate them from their company, and say all manner of evil against them falsely for Christ's sake." And are not such persons enemies to Christ? Yes; he considers himself as the real butt of their malice. Saul thought he was justly punishing some wild fanatics when he dragged the Christians to prison and to death; but Jesus said to him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *me*[f]? And the prophet tells us that whosoever toucheth the Lord's people, toucheth the apple of his eye[g].]

The extreme enormity of their conduct appears in this,

II. That the hatred of Christ is, in fact, a hatred of the Father also—

Christ is essentially "one with the Father;" and as "whosoever had seen Christ, had seen the Father," so, "whosoever hateth Christ must of necessity hate the Father also." But it is evident in other points of view that they hate the Father; for they hate,

1. His authority—

[God commands all men to believe in his Son, to "kiss him" with holy reverence, and to honour him even as they honour the Father[h]. But the unequivocal language of those who comply not with his command is, "We will not have this man to reign over us;" "Who is the Lord that we should obey him? we know not the Lord, neither will we obey his voice." Whatever they may pretend, they are not deceived through unavoidable ignorance, or impelled by irresistible force to reject Christ; they do it from a rooted aversion to the Father himself, and evince by their conduct the truth of that declaration, "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be[i]."]

2. His image—

[The word, the ordinances, and the people of God, all bear upon them the impression of God's holiness: and this is the very ground of that aversion which rises against them in the hearts of the ungodly. The Gospel is disliked as requiring so much purity and self-denial. The worship of God could be

[e] Gal. iv. 29. [f] Acts ix. 4. [g] Zech. ii. 8.
[h] Ps. ii. 12. John v. 23. [i] Rom. viii. 7.

easily tolerated, if an outward form would suffice; but the spirituality and devotion necessary to an acceptable performance of this duty, causes the carnal heart to revolt from it as irksome. If the saints too would countenance the world in its sinful practices, the offence of the cross would cease: but they "make their light to shine before men;" and on this account they, whose deeds are evil, hate, revile, and persecute them. Now this clearly proves, that holiness itself is their aversion, and consequently that the image of God, which principally consists in holiness, is hateful to them. Will any say, It is hypocrisy that they hate, and not holiness? Wherefore then were Christ and his Apostles so universally the objects of cruel persecution? Was there any guile in him? Was he not "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person?" and walked not his Disciples in his steps? It is certain, not only that the image of God is hated by the enemies of Christ, but that every thing that bears his image is hated by them *on that very account*, and *in proportion* as it exhibits a resemblance of him.]

3. His very existence—

[It is vain indeed to entertain the thought that God could be annihilated: but, if we could suppose for a moment that it were declared from heaven, "There is no God;" would not the tidings excite a general satisfaction? Would not all the haters of Christ congratulate themselves that there was no God to call them to an account, none to punish them for their iniquities? Would they not look forward to an unrestrained indulgence of their lusts with pleasure, instead of weeping for the loss of their best and dearest Friend? Yes; as the enemies of Christ exulted in his crucifixion, so would all who hate him rejoice, if the Father also were utterly extinct. That this is no fanciful idea will appear from the declaration of God himself, "The fool hath said in his heart, No God[k]!"]

INFER—

1. How desperate is the wickedness of the human heart!

[Wherefore is it that men are so full of enmity against Christ and his Father? Is it for having given us his dear Son that they hate the Father; or do they hate Christ for laying down his life for us? Many good things has he done; for which of them do we reject him? O let "the haters of God," as the Apostle calls all of us in our unconverted state[l], blush and be confounded; let them abhor themselves for all their

[k] Ps. xiv. 1 [l] Rom. i. 30.

iniquities and abominations: for what our Lord says of us is strictly true, "We have hated both him and his Father[m]."]

2. What a dreadful place must hell be!

[Here the wickedness of men is restrained by the preventing grace of God: but in hell it will rage without controul. How will all the miserable spirits then vent their malice! How will they gnaw their tongues, and blaspheme their God[n]! May *we* never know this by bitter experience!]

3. How astonishing is the tender mercy of our God!

[One would suppose that God should feel nothing but indignation against such an ungrateful world. But behold! he "waiteth to be gracious unto them;" he sends them offers of pardon; he even entreats and "beseeches them to be reconciled to him[o]. O let his goodness lead us to repentance! Let us cast away the weapons of our rebellion, and bow to the sceptre of his grace. So shall we yet be numbered among the friends of God, and be lively monuments of his mercy to all eternity.]

[m] ver. 24. [n] Rev. xvi. 9. [o] 2 Cor. v. 20.

OUTLINE NO. 1701

THE PERSONALITY AND OFFICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

John xv. 26. *When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.*

THE characters of the most holy men may suffer from envy and malevolence; but their righteousness often shines forth the brighter afterwards, as the sun obscured for awhile by an intervening cloud. According to all human appearances, our Lord's name must either have sunk into speedy oblivion, or been handed down with infamy to the latest posterity. It scarcely seemed possible that the ignominy of his cross could ever be so obliterated as to be succeeded by respect and honour: but our Lord knew that the testimony of the Spirit would assuredly effect this. While therefore he consoled both himself and his Disciples with the reflection, that the causeless enmity of his countrymen was nothing more than a completion of the prophecies, he taught them to look forward to

the time, when the Spirit of God should come down visibly from heaven, and by the most indubitable testimony efface every stain, and rectify the mistaken apprehensions of the world respecting him.

Let us consider,

I. Our Lord's description of his promised messenger—

In speaking of the inscrutable mysteries of our religion, we are constrained to represent heavenly things in terms, not strictly just perhaps, but such as are best accommodated to our own feeble apprehensions. We observe then respecting the messenger whom Jesus undertook to send, that,

He is a distinct person—

[Many deny the distinct personality of the Spirit, and affirm that he is only a virtue or quality belonging to the Father: but our text clearly shews, that this is not a just and scriptural idea: the names here given to the Spirit, as "the Comforter," and "the Spirit of Truth," import that he is a distinct person. And the circumstance of his mission leaves no doubt upon the subject; for he "proceeds from the Father," is "sent" by the Son, and comes down to us. Besides, the very end of his mission implies the same; for he comes to "testify," that is, to be a witness.]

Yet, though distinct from the Father, he is, in his essential properties, equal to him—

[He is sent to testify to all persons, in all places, at the very same instant of time: and does not the execution of such an office require both omnipresence and omniscience? Must he not know what every person needs to be instructed in, and be every where present to hear and grant their requests? And are there any attributes more appropriate to the Deity than these? Yet these the Spirit has in common with the Father: David says respecting him, "Whither shall I go then from thy Spirit? If I go up to heaven, thou art there; if I go down to hell, thou art there also[a]:" and St. Paul observes that "the Spirit searcheth all things, even the deep things of God[b]." Nor are these testimonies unsupported by others that are yet more direct and clear: for the Spirit is constantly joined both with the Father and the Son as equally worthy of the highest honour[c], and equally a source of the richest blessings[d]. Indeed he is expressly and repeatedly called GOD. They who lied unto

[a] Ps. cxxxix. 6, 7. [b] 1 Cor. ii. 10.
[c] Matt. xxviii. 19. [d] 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

HIM, were *therefore* guilty of lying unto God[e]; and they who had HIM dwelling in them, were *therefore* the temples of the living God[f].]

Nevertheless in some respects he is subordinate both to the Father and the Son—

[*In the order of subsistence,* as the Father is not of the Son, but the Son of the Father, so neither the Father nor the Son proceeds from the Spirit, but the Spirit from them, inasmuch as he proceeds from the Father, and is sent by the Son. *In the order of operation also* the Spirit is inferior: the Father is represented as the fountain of authority and of blessings: the Son acts as his servant[g]: and the Spirit acts under Christ, being sent or deputed by him, (according as it was determined in the eternal counsels of the Father,) to apply to men that redemption, which was procured for them by his death. The Spirit acted in this subordinate capacity *before the time of Christ's incarnation:* it was by him that Christ went and preached to the antediluvian world[h]: by him also he inspired the prophets to foretel the things relating to his sufferings and glory[i]. *During the days of our Lord's ministry on earth* the Spirit still acted in subserviency to him; it was by the Spirit that Christ cast out devils[k], and performed his other miracles. In a more especial manner did the Spirit exert himself in subserviency to Christ *after he had ascended to heaven;* it was *then* that the Spirit began *fully* to execute the office assigned him, and to "glorify Christ" before an ungodly and unbelieving world[l]. *To this very hour* does the Spirit bear the same part, "convincing the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment[m]," in order to magnify Christ, and to enlarge his kingdom.]

As our attention is principally directed to the Holy Spirit, we shall proceed to state,

II. The particular office committed to him—

The Father, Son, and Spirit, have distinct and different offices in the economy of redemption. That of the Spirit is twofold:

1. To be a witness for Christ—

[Our blessed Lord died under circumstances of the deepest ignominy and reproach; being treated by his whole nation as the vilest of malefactors. Nor could it be conceived that one, who under such circumstances saved not himself, should be

[e] Acts v. 3, 4.
[f] 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.
[g] Isai. xlii. 1.
[h] 1 Pet. iii. 18, 19.
[i] 1 Pet. i. 11.
[k] Matt. xii. 28.
[l] John xvi. 14.
[m] John xvi. 8.

constituted by God the Saviour of others. This was, to all appearance, so absurd an idea that it never could have gained any credit in the world, if it had not been confirmed by the most unquestionable testimony. To overcome these obstacles, the Holy Spirit testified of two things, namely, the righteousness of his person, and the sufficiency of his salvation. While the Apostles testified of these things to the ears of men, the Spirit confirmed their word with visible signs[n], and sealed it on men's hearts by his invisible, but effectual, influence[o]. This he did, not only on the day of Pentecost, when three thousand were converted at once, but on many other occasions. It is worthy of remark, that when he visibly descended on the Gentiles in confirmation of the word that was delivered by Peter, he descended at the very instant that the Apostle began to speak of the fulness and excellency of Christ's salvation[p]; as though he designed to intimate, that this was the great truth which he came to attest, and which we ought to receive with our whole hearts.]

2. To be a Comforter to us—

[When a soul begins to feel its guilty and undone state, it needs a comforter: but there is no creature in heaven or earth that can administer effectual consolation; none but the Holy Spirit is sufficient for so great a work: if he reveal Christ to the soul, all tears will instantly be wiped away; but if he withhold his influence, sorrow and despondency will overwhelm it utterly. Thus also in all subsequent trials and temptations, it is the Holy Ghost alone that can heal the wounded spirit, or bind up the broken and contrite heart. And it must further be noticed, that the principal, if not the only, way, in which he administers consolation to us, is by testifying of Christ; it is by shewing to us his beauty, his sufficiency, his truth and faithfulness, and by enabling us to rest entirely on him: and as there can be no comfort till this be done, so there can be nothing but joy and exultation arising from it.]

This subject naturally leads us to REFLECT,

1. How great and glorious a person Christ is!

[It has been already shewn that the Holy Spirit is God equal with the Father: yet has Christ authority to send him into our hearts. If Christ say, Go, my Spirit, and quicken that dead sinner; go and dwell in that polluted heart; go and comfort that drooping and desponding soul; in short, whatever commission Jesus gives to the ever-blessed Spirit, it is executed instantly, and to its utmost extent. No unworthiness

[n] Heb. ii. 4. [o] 1 Thess. i. 5. [p] Acts x. 43, 44

in us excites any reluctance in the mind of the Spirit; if Jesus do but speak, it is done. Who then would not wish to have this glorious person for his friend? Who does not desire an interest in him? Who would not seek him who is so able and willing to save? Blessed Lord, send thy Spirit *now* to testify of thee, and to glorify thee in all our hearts!]

2. How unspeakable is the happiness of Christ's faithful people!

[These enjoy the witness of the Spirit in their own hearts[q]. The Spirit not only testifies to them that Jesus is the Saviour of believers in general, but their Saviour in particular: he witnesses to, and with, their spirits, that they are children of God; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ[r]. Can we conceive any greater happiness than this? Surely not in this present world. Let every one then aspire after this honour: let every one seek the Spirit, not merely as an instructor, but a comforter. Thus shall we be filled with consolation, even under the most afflictive circumstances; and his testimonies shall prove to us an earnest, and a foretaste, of our heavenly inheritance.]

[q] 1 John v. 10. [r] Rom. viii. 16, 17.

OUTLINE NO. 1702

OFFICES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

John xvi. 8—11. *And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.*

IN judging of the dispensations of God's providence or grace, we are extremely apt to err. Hence we often mourn for things, which, if we knew the end of them, would afford us occasion for joy. This was the case with the Disciples, who were dejected on account of their Lord's approaching departure from them. To relieve their minds, our Lord not only promised them another Comforter, but told them for what ends and purposes that Comforter should come:

I. To "convince the world of sin"—

This office the Spirit executed among the Jews—

[The sin of rejecting Christ was that which the Spirit was more particularly to reveal to the world; and he discovered it fully by his *miraculous operations* on the Disciples[a], and wrought an irresistible conviction of it by his *gracious influences* on the hearts of thousands.]

This office too he yet executes in the Christian Church—

[The external testimony which he gave, remains the same in all ages: the internal witness is given to those only whom "God has ordained to life." To them the Spirit shews the number, the greatness, the malignity of their sins; and particularly, the guilt, and danger of that unbelief, in which they have ignorantly lain. This is the Spirit's work; nor is it wrought in any, but by his almighty power[b].]

If he proceeded no farther, he would not be a Comforter; but it is his office also,

II. To convince the world "of righteousness"—

This also was accomplished by him on his first descent from heaven—

[Christ, though professing himself the Saviour of the world, had been crucified as a malefactor. The Spirit therefore was to evince, both that Christ was a righteous person, and that through his righteousness others also might be saved. Accordingly, by his descent, the Spirit proved these things beyond a doubt. He shewed that Christ was accepted of the Father (which he would not have been, if he had been an impostor), and had finished all that was necessary for our salvation; seeing that, if any thing had remained to have been done on earth, he must have returned hither in order to complete it[c]. He moreover inclined, and enabled multitudes to believe on HIM for righteousness, whom they had just before reprobated as worthy of universal execration.]

And yet daily is he occupied in glorifying Christ among us—

[Whomsoever the Spirit convinces thoroughly of sin, he leads also to discoveries of Christ. He shews to the soul

[a] Christ had rested, as it were, the whole credit of his Messiahship on this one point: consequently, the visible descent of the Spirit, accompanied with the miraculous gift of tongues, was such an attestation to Christ, as could not be doubted, and such a reproof to his murderers as could not be withstood.

[b] Zech. iv. 6. 2 Cor. v. 5. 1 Cor. xii. 11.

[c] See the text.

the suitableness and all-sufficiency of Christ's righteousness to all those who trust in it[d], and leads them, with holy glorying, to say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength[e]."]

He has yet further undertaken,

III. To convince the world of judgment—

He shewed to the first Christians that Satan was a vanquished foe—

[By the descent of the Spirit it was manifest, that Christ had triumphed over sin and Satan, death and hell[f]. By his gracious influences also, he rescued myriads from their power, and inspired them with an holy confidence, that they should finally prevail over all their spiritual enemies[g].]

Thus at this day does he cause the weakest to exult over their fallen enemy—

[However active and malicious Satan is, his head is bruised[h], his power is limited[i], his doom is fixed[k]. Of this the Holy Spirit assures the weak and trembling believer; and puts into his mouth, even in the midst of all his conflicts, that triumphant sóng[l]—]

USES—

1. Of conviction—

[All true Christians have received the Spirit for the ends and purposes for which he is here promised. In vain then will be our orthodoxy in sentiment, if we have not this evidence of our conversion to God[m]. Let us pray that the Spirit may be poured out upon us; and let our views of our guilt and weakness lead us to glory in Christ alone.]

2. Of consolation—

[Are we bowed down with a *sense* of sin? we may be sure that Christ has sent his Spirit to work that conviction in us; and that, if we be instant in prayer, he will, by the same Spirit, lead us also to a view of his righteousness. Are we ready to despond by reason of the *power* of sin? the resistance which the Holy Spirit has enabled us already to make to its dominion, is a pledge that "we shall be more than conquerors, through Him that loved us[n]." Let us only seek the Spirit as our Comforter, and we need regret no loss, no pain, no trouble, that may be the means of bringing him into our hearts.]

[d] ver. 14. [e] Isai. xlv. 24. [f] Eph. iv. 8. Col. ii. 15.
[g] 2 Tim. i. 12. [h] Gen. iii. 15. [i] Rev. ii. 10. 1 Pet. v. 8.
[k] Rom. xvi. 20. [l] Rom. viii. 38, 39. [m] Rom. viii. 9.
[n] Rom. viii. 37.

OUTLINE NO. 1703

THE OFFICE OF THE SPIRIT TO GLORIFY CHRIST.

John xvi. 14. *He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.*

MANY imagine that the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ is founded on some few passages only of Holy Writ, on passages too which may possibly be of doubtful interpretation. But the truth is, that that doctrine pervades the whole New Testament; so that scarcely any part of it can be fairly explained except on the hypothesis, that Christ is God. Take for instance the passage before us. Our blessed Saviour told his Disciples that he would "*send* to them the Comforter, even the Spirit of Truth, who should guide them into all truth, and shew them things to come[a]." But is he a *man*, or a mere *created being*, that arrogates to himself this power? Of that Spirit he proceeds to say, "He shall glorify *me*." What language is this? Does a *creature* say, he will send the Spirit of the living God to glorify *him?* That *God* should send a *creature* for the advancement of *his own* glory, is intelligible enough: but that a *creature* should send *God* for the advancement of *his* glory, is what no rational being would for a moment admit. But further; our Saviour adds, "He shall receive of *mine*, and shall shew it unto you." What! Has a *creature* any thing that he can call *his own;* and which is of so mysterious a nature, that it cannot be known, except God himself shall make it the subject of a special revelation? And has he such *an exclusive propriety* in that thing, that it must be acknowledged to be *his*, at the very time that God is taking of it in order to shew it unto men? This was so strong an assertion of his Godhead, that the Disciples themselves appear to have been staggered at it; on which account our Lord proceeded to vindicate and confirm the expression he had used: "All that the Father hath, is *mine:* therefore said I that he shall take of *mine*, and shall shew it unto you[b].

[a] ver. 7, 13. [b] ver. 15.

The whole declaration, if viewed in this light only, is of infinite importance: but, without insisting on this doctrine, which only incidentally arises out of the text, we shall turn our attention to the doctrines more directly contained in it; and shall shew you,

I. The office of the Spirit—

The whole of our Saviour's life was a state of humiliation: the establishing of his proper character was committed to the third Person in the ever-blessed Trinity, who was in due time to come down from heaven for the express purpose of glorifying Christ. In what way he was to glorify Christ, is specified in the text; he was to take, as it were, all the excellencies of Christ, and to display them before the eyes of all his people. Among these excellencies we will mention a few, which are deserving of more especial notice:

1. The virtue of his sacrifice—

[Man, as soon as he begins to be truly "convinced of sin," is apt to doubt whether his iniquities be not too great to be forgiven. But the Holy Spirit discovers to him from the word, that the death of Christ was a propitiation, not for the sins of a few only, but for the sins of the whole world; that "his blood has an efficacy to cleanse from all sin;" and that all who believe in him "shall be justified from all things," even from "sins of a scarlet or crimson dye." How glorious does Christ then appear in the sinner's eyes!]

2. The prevalence of his intercession—

[After a person has believed in Christ, he still is renewed only in part; "the flesh still lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, so that he cannot do the things that he would." Hence he is sometimes led to fear that God will cast him off, and be no more entreated by him. Then the Holy Spirit shews him that Christ is "his Advocate with the Father[c]," and that he "ever liveth in heaven on purpose to make intercession for him." He convinces him that Christ can never intercede in vain, for that "*him* the Father heareth always;" and that consequently the backslider, as well as the newly-awakened sinner, shall be saved to the uttermost, if only he look to Christ as his all-prevailing Advocate and Mediator. Thus the Spirit still further endears the Saviour to the believing soul.]

[c] 1 John ii. 1, 2.

3. The sufficiency of his grace—

[Conflicts innumerable both with sin and Satan will still remain, even such conflicts as may bring the believer sometimes to the borders of despair. But then the Spirit again proceeds in his work of glorifying Christ: he shews the soul, that there is, by the Father's own appointment, an inexhaustible fulness of grace treasured up in Christ[d], out of which his people shall receive all the grace that they shall stand in need of[e]: and that, whatever their conflicts or temptations may be, his grace shall be sufficient for them[f]. How precious does Christ then become, when the believer, after crying, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" is enabled to add, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord[g]:" "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength[h]!"]

4. The extent of his love—

[Of this no finite being can form any adequate idea; much less can the language of mortality express it. But in some degree it is the privilege of "all saints to have" it "revealed to them by the Spirit." The times and seasons, as well as the manner and degree, of making this revelation to the soul, are altogether ordered by that Spirit "who divideth to every man severally as he will." Generally it is in some season of trial or affliction, and by means either of some remarkable providence, or of the written word, that he thus glorifies Christ: but, O! when he does take of the love of Christ, and discover unto men "its length and breadth and depth and height[i], what joy and transport does he impart! truly it is "a joy that is unspeakable and glorified;" a very heaven upon earth. Such manifestations of the Saviour's glory cannot be made to the world, because the world has no dispositions suited to them: but to the believer they are made; and they produce in him a determination of heart to consecrate himself wholly and for ever to the Lord.]

5. The greatness of his salvation—

[Salvation, when first embraced, is regarded almost exclusively as a deliverance from everlasting punishment. But when the Spirit of God brings it more fully to our view, how amazing does it appear: and how glorious does that Saviour appear who has obtained it for us! The renovation of the soul after the Divine image, and the investing of it with all the glory and felicity of heaven, a glory inconceivable, a felicity everlasting; truly salvation, in this view of it, overwhelms the soul with wonder, and prepares it to do and suffer whatever can be done or suffered, for the ultimate enjoyment of it.]

[d] Col. ii. 9. [e] John i. 16. [f] 2 Cor. xii. 9.
[g] Rom. vii. 24, 25. [h] Isai. xlv. 24, 25. [i] Eph. iii. 17, 18.

Such being the office of the Spirit, let us consider,

II. Our duty arising from it—

We have an office similar in some respects to that which is sustained by the Spirit himself: we are all in our place and station to glorify Christ, and to take *of the things that* are his, and shew them unto men.

This is our DUTY,

1. As Ministers—

[Our Lord particularly marks this connexion between the office of the Holy Spirit, and that which his Disciples were to execute in the world[k]. They were sent forth, as all other ministers are, to testify of Christ, and to exalt him in the eyes of men. At this day, no less than in the apostolic age, is this the duty of those who are his ambassadors to a guilty world: we are to speak of Christ, to set forth the fulness and excellency of his salvation, and to commend him to the love of all around us. Counting all things but dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ ourselves, we should labour day and night to impart it unto others. How earnest the Apostles were in this blessed work, may be seen from their first addresses to the unbelieving Jews[l]: and we in like manner should "contend earnestly for the faith," and determine to know nothing among our people but Jesus Christ and him crucified. The treasure of divine knowledge is put into us, as earthen vessels, for this purpose; and "God has shined into our hearts for this very end, that we may give unto all around us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ[m]." What a glorious office is this! O that every minister bore it fully in mind: and that all who profess to execute it, might execute it with their whole hearts, and "with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven!"]

2. As private Christians—

[Our Lord assigns the same office to all his people; "All mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them[n]." All indeed are not called upon to exert themselves as ministers: but all are to glorify Christ by a holy conversation, and are to take of *his* virtues and *his* graces, and to exhibit them to the world. This is one end of their calling, namely, "to shew forth the *virtues* of him that hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light[o]." All are to "shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life"

[k] John xv. 26, 27. [l] Acts ii. 32—36. and iv. 10—12.
[m] 2 Cor. iv. 6, 7. [n] John xvii. 10.
[o] 1 Pet. ii. 9. The marginal reading.

in their own conduct, so that all may read it, yea, may be compelled to read it, as transcribed in their lives[p]. What an exalted office is this for every private Christian! O that all might be ambitious to execute it aright! for Christ himself has said, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye may bring forth much fruit; so shall ye be my Disciples[q]."]

[p] Phil. ii. 15, 16. [q] John xv. 8.

OUTLINE NO. 1704

THE BENEFIT OF PRAYER.

John xvi. 24. *Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.*

THIS world is justly characterized as a vale of tears. Even they who experience the most happiness, find many interruptions of it: nor is there any way of securing permanent tranquillity, but by waiting upon God in prayer.

The Disciples were sorrowful on account of the approaching departure of their Lord, with whom they had hitherto enjoyed the most familiar fellowship. Our Lord tells them, that though they would no longer be able to *inquire*[a] of him, yet, if they would *ask*[b] of the Father in his name, he would grant them whatsoever they should need; and that the answers which they should receive to their prayers would abundantly overbalance the loss of their present privileges, and fill them with unutterable joy.

In the direction given them, we may notice,

I. Our duty—

It is comprised in one word, "Ask." Now this is,

1. An easy duty—

[We do not mean that it is always easy to pray, (for there is nothing more difficult when the heart is indisposed for that exercise;) but that is the easiest condition that could possibly be imposed — — — and that, when the heart is in a proper frame, prayer is as easy to the soul, as breathing is to the body: it is the first, and most natural, effort of a living soul: "Behold, he prayeth[c]!"]

[a] ver. 23. ἐρωτήσετε. [b] ver. 23. αἰτήσητε. [c] Acts ix. 11.

2. A reasonable duty—

[Man is a dependent creature; and it is but reasonable that he should acknowledge that dependence at a throne of grace, and ask for those mercies which he stands in need of. The very heathens have felt the propriety of supplicating their deities, and have established ordinances whereby they might conciliate the favour of their gods. It is true, that God knows our necessities before we ask: yet is it highly proper that we should spread them before him, in order that we ourselves may be humbled under a sense of them, and that God's mercy in relieving them may be more clearly seen.]

3. A necessary duty—

[Though God cannot be prevailed upon by dint of importunity[d], yet he has appointed prayer as the means of obtaining his blessings. He has said, "I will be inquired of to do it for them[e]." There is no room therefore left for us to speculate upon the use of prayer: it is quite sufficient that God has required it as means to an end: and if we will not comply with his injunctions respecting it, it is utterly in vain for us to expect his blessings.]

4. An acceptable duty—

[Prayer offered to the Deity without any respect to the mediation of Christ, is not acceptable: but when presented in a humble dependence on his atonement, and intercession, it comes up before God as incense, and prevails beyond the utmost extent of our conceptions. It is to prayer *offered in this manner*, that the promise in the text is given[f]. And this has been the qualification of all acceptable prayer from the beginning. Abel was heard on account of his sacrifice[g]. The penitents under the law obtained mercy in no other way[h]. The Jews, when unable, by reason of their captivity, to offer their accustomed sacrifices, were to look towards the temple, which was a type of our incarnate God[i]. And to that same Jesus must we look, trusting in him as "our Advocate with the Father, and as the propitiation for our sins[k]." Nor did any one ever ask *in this manner* without obtaining a supply of all his wants.]

To counteract the backwardness of our hearts to this duty, let us consider,

[d] The expressions, Luke xviii. 7, 8. must not lead us to think of God as though he were wrought upon as we are.

[e] Ezek. xxxvi. 37. [f] ver. 23, 24. [g] Heb. xi. 4.

[h] Heb. ix. 22. [i] 1 Kings viii. 47, 48. Dan. vi. 10.

[k] 1 John ii. 1, 2.

II. Our encouragement to perform it—

The promise of acceptance is without any limit or exception—

[There is no exception with respect to the persons who may apply to God. The vilest person in the universe, provided he ask *in the manner prescribed in the text*, shall be heard as readily as the very chief of the Apostles. His past iniquities, of whatever kind they have been, shall not operate as any bar to his acceptance with God — — —

Nor is there any limit respecting the blessings we implore: provided they will really conduce to our good, and to God's glory, they shall be given. However "wide we open our mouths, God will fill them[l]" — — — The frequent and solemn repetition of this truth by our Lord himself, must of necessity remove all doubt upon the subject[m]."]

And instances of its accomplishment occur in almost every page of the sacred writings—

[Whether Abel's prayer was answered by fire from heaven which consumed his sacrifice, or by some other token of the Divine favour, the acceptance of it was equally manifest, and the fact is equally encouraging to us. To recount the various instances that occurred from that period to the times of Christ and his Apostles, would be a pleasing task, but would occupy many hours. Suffice it to say, that whether men's prayer has been offered for themselves[n] or for others[o], and whether it has been of a more stated and solemn kind[p], or only in a sudden ejaculation[q], it has equally prevailed; it has prevailed speedily[r], and to a most incredible extent[s]; and shall yet prevail, by whomsoever it may be offered[t].]

This encouragement to prayer is greatly heightened by what is added respecting,

III. The consequence of a due and acceptable performance of it—

God delights in the prosperity of his people; and desires that they should be happy here, as well as in the world to come. It is with this view that he has enjoined prayer as a duty; because, when performed

[l] Ps. lxxxi. 10. John xiv. 13, 14. [m] Matt. vii. 7, 8.
[n] Jonah ii. 1, 7. [o] Exod. xxxii. 11—14. Acts xii. 5—9.
[p] Ps. xviii. 6. [q] Neh. ii. 4—6.
[r] 2 Kings xx. 2, 4, 5. Dan. ix. 20, 21, 23. [s] Jam. v. 17, 18.
[t] Jam. v. 16.

aright, it is the means of filling the soul with the sublimest joy.

1. It tranquillizes the most perturbed mind—

[Let a person under any sudden irritation or calamity betake himself to prayer, and he will speedily find the tempest calmed, and his agitations quieted. No other thing will operate like this. It will enable him to educe good out of every evil: it will not only blunt the edge of all his trials, but will turn his sorrows into joy[u].]

2. It brings God nigh unto the soul—

[God in answer to prayer will take away the veil which intercepts our views of him, and "manifest himself to us, as he does not unto the world." What an exhibition of his glory was that which he vouchsafed to Moses! What a bright display of Christ's excellency was that which the three favoured Disciples were admitted to behold on Mount Tabor! We say not indeed that any similar vision of the Father or the Son shall ever be presented to our bodily eyes: but God will certainly "shine into the hearts of those who call upon him, to give them the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ[x];" and will enable them to say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ[y]." What ineffable delight must such manifestations bring with them! — — —]

3. It gives us an earnest and foretaste of heaven itself—

[The happiness of heaven consists in the vision and fruition of God: and this, as far as it can be enjoyed by faith, is enjoyed in prayer. There is not any one who has abounded in the performance of this duty, but has had frequent occasion, when in his closet, to exclaim with Jacob, "This is none other but the house of God, this is the gate of heaven[z]!" In such seasons as these a man has no occasion to search out evidences of his acceptance with God, or of his title to heaven; for the very intercourse which he has with the Deity is, if we may so speak, heaven brought down to earth; it is an actual anticipation of heaven, and a pledge of his complete possession of it in due season.]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who ask without receiving—

[Think not that God has violated his promise. The reason of your not receiving is, that "you ask amiss[a]." Your petitions

[u] Ps. xxx. 8—11. and xl. 1—3. [x] 2 Cor. iv. 6.
[y] 1 John i. 3. [z] Gen. xxviii. 17. [a] Jam. iv. 3.

are cold, formal, hypocritical; and you have not a due respect to the name of Jesus in presenting them to God. Perform your duty as you ought, and you shall never complain of a want of acceptance in it.]

2. To those who have received answers to prayer—

[Let not your communion with God puff you up with pride, but rather abase you in the dust. If once you grow vain and secure, you will provoke God to hide his face from you, and to withhold the communications of his grace. Rejoice in the glorious privileges you possess; but "rejoice with trembling."]

OUTLINE NO. 1705

THE OBJECTS OF THE FATHER'S LOVE.

John xvi. 27. *The Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.*

THE atonement and intercession of Christ are doubtless the grounds of a Christian's hope, and the richest source of his comforts: but much consolation also may be derived from the consideration of the Father's love; nor do we understand the Gospel aright, till we see that Christ himself was the gift of the Father's love, and that every blessing which we receive through Christ was prepared for us in the eternal counsels of the Father. Our Lord, solicitous to comfort his Disciples previous to his departure from them, directed their views unto the Father, assuring them, that, while they prayed to the Father in his name, they should find acceptance and support; and this too, not *merely* in consequence of his intercession, but also in consequence of the love which the Father himself bore towards them. In discoursing upon his words, we shall speak of,

I. The objects of the Father's love—

The description which our Lord gives of his own Disciples will characterize all his faithful followers to the end of time—

They love the Lord Jesus Christ—

[There is not a real Christian in the universe who does not *esteem* the Lord Jesus above every other being, *desire* him more than thousands of silver and gold, and *delight in* him as

the only source of true happiness. To love him more, and to serve him better, is the daily labour of his soul, and the very summit of his ambition.]

They believe in him—

[True Christians do not merely assent to this proposition, That Jesus is the Messiah; but they most cordially acquiesce in his appointment to that office; they trust altogether in his mediatorial work; and they seek to receive out of his fulness the blessings which he was sent to communicate.]

All who are of this description are, *for that very reason,* objects of the Father's love—

[By the exercise of faith and love, they honour the Lord Jesus Christ in the world; and in so doing they honour the Father also[a]: *on this account* the Father loves and honours them. We do not mean to intimate, that their graces *merit* the Divine favour (for "their best righteousnesses are as filthy rags[b]"); or that their graces are the *spring and source* of the Father's love (for God's love was from everlasting[c], and was exercised by him in a perfectly free and sovereign manner): but we say, that their exercise of faith and love is *the occasion* of God's *manifesting* his love to them. Abel's offering of a lamb, in token of his dependence on that Lamb of God which was to be slain in due time, was *the occasion* of God's testifying his acceptance in a visible manner; and God justified his apparent partiality, by declaring this act to have been *the ground* of the preference he had shewn to Abel[d]. When Abraham also had offered up his son, God made his faith and obedience *the occasion* and *the ground* of manifesting his love to Abraham[e]. The Scriptures uniformly speak the same language[f]; nor are we in danger of erring, provided we discriminate between the *meritorious ground* on which God's favours are secured, and the *particular occasion* on which his love may be *manifested.*]

If we believe that any are so distinguished by the Father we cannot but wish to know,

II. The manner in which he displays his love towards them—

We might easily trace this part of our subject in the experience of those to whom the words of the text were immediately addressed; but, as it is of general importance, we shall rather treat it in a way that is alike applicable to all:

[a] John v. 23. [b] Isai. lxiv. 6. [c] Jer. xxxi. 3.
[d] Gen. iv. 4—7. Heb. xi. 4. [e] Gen. xxii. 16, 17.
[f] Ps. xci. 14—16.

1. He watches over them by his providence—

[The dearest of God's children may appear to others, perhaps also to themselves, to be forsaken of God. But the Father's eye is ever upon them for good, and "runneth to and fro throughout the whole earth, to interpose effectually in their behalf[g]." They may be suffered to want for a season, in order that they may be stirred up to seek relief from him: but they shall assuredly be supplied with every thing that is needful for them[h]. They may experience many deep and heavy afflictions, but not one which shall not ultimately "work for their good[i]."]

2. He keeps them by his grace—

[God is not an unconcerned spectator of his people's conflicts. He shields their heads in the day of battle. If they fall, he raises them up; if they be wounded, he heals them; if they faint, he renews their strength[k]. He will not endue them with such a degree of grace as shall supersede the need of vigilance and exertion; nor will he commit to them a stock that shall suffice for months or days: but he will give them "grace to help *in the time of need*[l];" and that "grace shall be sufficient for them." Thus will he secure them from the destruction which they fear, and make them "more than conquerors, through Him that loved them[m]."]

3. He comforts them by his presence—

[Who can express the consolations which God sometimes pours into the souls of those who wait upon him? They have been weeping perhaps under a sense of sin, or lamenting a state of spiritual darkness; and behold, God reveals himself unto them: their "light rises in obscurity, and their darkness becomes as the noon-day." Often will God "manifest himself to them as he does not unto the world;" he will give them "a spirit of adoption, whereby they shall cry with confidence, Abba, Father;" and will so "shed abroad his love in their hearts," that they shall have "an earnest of their inheritance," and a foretaste of the heavenly glory. This is promised by God himself to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and is actually experienced by many who can attest his fidelity[n].]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are destitute of love to Christ, and of faith in him—

[g] 2 Chron. xvi. 9. [h] Ps. xxxiv. 10. [i] Rom. viii. 28.
[k] Ps. cxlvi. 7, 8. [l] Heb. iv. 16. [m] Rom. viii. 37.
[n] John xiv. 21, 23.

[If a mere profession of Christianity be a sufficient proof of our faith and love, we may spare ourselves the trouble of addressing any as though they were destitute of those graces. But if none truly love Christ or believe in him, except they who are altogether devoted to him in heart and life, then the persons we are addressing will be found to constitute the greater part, we fear, of almost every congregation. And what shall we say to such persons? Shall we address them in the words of our text, "The Father himself loveth you?" Would to God we could! But there is not one amongst you so ignorant, as not to know, that such an assertion would be false. Let your own consciences judge: Can God love those who neglect and despise his dear Son? Let the Scriptures determine. Does not St. Paul say, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha[o]?" Be assured that God cannot be your Father: for our Lord says expressly, "If God were your Father, ye would *love* me[p]." Be assured too, that if you die as you are, you must perish for ever; for Christ says again, "If ye *believe* not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins[q]." Repent ye then of all your ingratitude and unbelief, and "turn to your strong-hold, as prisoners of hope;" begin to "live by faith in the Son of God;" and "delight yourselves in him" now, that ye may be meet to enjoy him in a better world.]

2. Those to whom Christ is precious—

[Thanks be to God! there is a little flock that hear the voice of the good Shepherd, and that follow his steps. Think then, ye who love the Lord, how greatly ye are honoured, how highly ye are privileged; the Father himself loveth you! To say that all good and holy men loved you, or that all the angels in heaven loved you, would be a rich blessing: but to be loved by the Creator of men and angels, to be loved by the Father himself, O! who can estimate this blessing? It is true, that the very thing which causes God to love you, will cause the blind and the wicked world to hate you[r]: but why should you regard the hatred and contempt of men, if you are owned and approved of your God? "Let them curse, provided your God condescend to bless." And if your "love at any time be ready to wax cold through the abounding of iniquity" around you, remember that *the very thing which heightens man's resentment, will call forth the manifestations of God's favour;* and that when your enemies shall "want a drop of water to cool their tongue," you shall "be drinking of those rivers of pleasure which are at God's right hand for evermore."

[o] 1 Cor. xvi. 22. [p] John viii. 42. [q] John viii. 24. [r] John xv. 19.

OUTLINE NO. 1706

AN INQUIRY INTO THE REALITY AND DEGREE OF OUR FAITH.

John xvi. 31. *Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe?*

THE meekness and gentleness of Christ were manifested on all occasions. Even his reproofs were tempered with inexpressible kindness, and fully justified the description given of him by the prophet, "He shall not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax." He had been speaking plainly about his departure from the world: and his Disciples, understanding him somewhat better than before, were now confident that they believed in him. But he, knowing the very low state of their attainments, mildly reproved their mistaken confidence, and warned them of the sad discovery which they would shortly make of their unbelief. The mode in which our Lord put the question to them was very significant. To mark its true import, I will bring it before you,

I. In a way of explanation—

If we consider the question in connexion with the foregoing and following context, it will be found to contain several important truths:

1. That many think they believe, when they are wholly destitute of faith—

[The nature of faith is very little understood. It is generally supposed to be a mere assent to the Gospel as true; whereas it is a living operative principle, infused into the soul by the Holy Ghost[a]. From these mistaken views of faith, every one of course conceives himself to be a believer. The worldling, the self-righteous Pharisee, the sensualist, yea all, except avowed infidels, lay claim to this appellation; and, while they acknowledge themselves to need correction with respect to morals, have no idea at all that they need instruction with respect to their faith — — — This self-deception universally obtained among the unconverted Jews, who "*trusted in* Moses," not doubting but that they believed his writings, though they shewed by their rejection of Christ, that they did not believe them[b]: and too much of the same spirit

[a] Phil. i. 29. [b] John v. 45—47.

yet manifested itself in those who had become the stated followers of our Lord.]

2. That many, who have some faith, are yet much under the influence of unbelief—

[As for unregenerate men, they have no faith at all, no, not even in the plainest truths of our religion; for though they assent to many truths, they feel not the force, nor experience the vital influence of any. Nor, when faith is imparted to the soul, is unbelief altogether eradicated; yea, it will be well if the natural principle do not, in many and very alarming instances, overcome the new-created principle which ought to govern the whole man[c]——— Thus it was with the Apostles in the passage before us: our Lord acknowledges that they were true believers[d]; but intimates that they would soon manifest, by their dereliction of him, how weak and insufficient their faith at present was. And thus it is with all, though in different degress, till they have been taught and disciplined in the school of Christ.]

3. That heavy trials will discover the state of our souls with respect to faith—

[Affliction is a touchstone whereby all our graces, and especially our faith, may be tried. If our faith be strong, we shall approve ourselves to God under the most arduous circumstances: if it be weak, we shall be ready to faint at the approach of any dangers we fear[e], and to adopt sinful methods of attaining any ends we desire[f]. If we have nothing but a false faith, we shall "make shipwreck both of it and of a good conscience" as soon as ever we are brought into any storms of difficulty and temptation: if our troubles be of a spiritual nature, we shall flee from God, and reject his grace[g]: or if they arise from temporal things, we shall be offended with God, and condemn his providence. For the effects of weak faith we need look no further than to the passage before us. The immediate scope of our Lord's question was, to put his disciples on their guard against their remaining unbelief; and, by warning them of their approaching fall, to encourage and facilitate their speedy recovery: and we may learn from their example that, if our faith be not increased in proportion to our trials, we shall surely faint in the day of adversity.]

If such truths be implied in the interrogation before us, we may well urge it upon you,

II. In a way of personal inquiry—

[c] Gal. v. 17. [d] ver. 27. [e] Matt. xiv. 30, 31.
[f] Gen. xxvii. 6—10. [g] Gen. iii. 8.

We are particularly exhorted to "examine ourselves whether we be in the faith[h]." Let all of us then inquire into,

1. The reality of our faith—

[Before we conclude too confidently that we are believers, we should ask ourselves, *Whence we obtained our faith?* It is not a plant of nature's growth; nor is it formed in us by human teaching. There is but one way in which it ever is or can be obtained, namely, by acknowledging our unbelief before God, and imploring him to create a lively faith in our hearts by his blessed Spirit. If we have never been "convinced of unbelief," we have not yet one grain of real faith[i]. But if this inquiry be satisfactorily answered, we should further ask, *How our faith operates?* If it be genuine and scriptural, it will overcome the world, and work by love, and purify the heart[k]. But has it these effects? — — — We are warned by God that "all men have not faith[l];" nor should we conclude that *we* have, unless we manifest it in its fruits.]

2. The degree of our faith—

[If we cannot ascertain precisely the degree of our faith, we yet have grounds whereon we may form some estimate. *Are we enabled to realize the things which are invisible?* This is a very principal office of faith; and in proportion as we are enabled to set God before our eyes, and to keep heaven in view, we may safely conclude that we have that principle, which alone can produce this effect. *Do we maintain our hope under discouraging circumstances?* This was the mark whereby the strength of Abraham's faith was so fully known[m]: and, if we be strong in faith, we shall be steadfast under heavy and long-protracted trials, and "against hope believe in hope." *Are we kept diligent in the way of duty?* It is presumption, and not faith, that leads us to relax our diligence in the use of means: the more faith we have, the greater will be our activity in every good work[n]. The various offices of faith are fully delineated in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews; and by comparing our spirit and conduct with that of the saints there mentioned, we may weigh ourselves in the balance of the sanctuary. In this way we may provide an answer to the interrogation in the text; and, instead of boasting as though we had attained, shall learn to reply, "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief."]

APPLICATION—

[h] 2 Cor. xiii. 5.
[i] John xvi. 8, 9.
[k] 1 John v. 4. Gal. v. 6. Acts xv. 9.
[l] 2 Thess. iii. 2.
[m] Rom. iv. 18—20.
[n] 1 Thess. i. 3.

[Trials must ere long come upon every soul amongst us: and then nothing but faith will support us[o]. And even now if our graces be examined, it will be found that our progress has been in exact proportion to our faith. Let us then pray with the Apostles, "Lord, increase our faith; that through it we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."]

[o] 1 Pet. i. 5—7.

OUTLINE NO. 1707

OUR LORD'S PRAYER TO BE GLORIFIED ON EARTH.

John xvii. 1. *These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.*

THE work of intercession belongs to Christ, as the High-Priest of his Church. We know not the precise manner in which He carries it on within the vail, but we may form some idea of it from the specimen recorded in this chapter. He had given all the instructions necessary for the support and comfort of his Disciples; and now, in their hearing, concluded with this sublime and pathetic prayer; but before he interceded for them, he offered one petition for himself.

In explaining the words before us, we shall consider,

I. Our Lord's request—

His outward gesture corresponded with the feelings of his heart. Deeply affected with his own condition, he presented a request well suited to his circumstances. It imported,

1. That his Father should bear testimony to him in his trouble—

[Jesus was now to endure all possible indignities, as an impostor. On this account he more than ever needed a testimony on his behalf; and God, in answer to this request, gave ample testimony to his Messiahship[a].]

[a] He caused both him that betrayed, and him that condemned, our Lord, to attest his innocence; and made even the inanimate creation to bear witness to him.

2. That he should support him under it—

[As man, our Lord needed the supports of Divine grace: and these he was to obtain, like ourselves, by fervent prayer. Nor was his application for them made to his Father in vain. Under his most accumulated distresses, both of body and soul, he was kept unspotted with the slightest stain of sin or error[b].]

3. That he should bring him out of it—

[Had there been no interposition of the Deity to rescue him from his disgrace, his enemies would have had reason to triumph; but God delivered him from the grave, and exalted him to glory, and made those very precautions, that were used to ascertain and expose his imposture, the means of establishing the truth which they were intended to subvert.]

4. That he should render it effectual to the salvation of men—

[Without this, all our Lord's sufferings would have been in vain. But while he yet hanged on the cross, the saving efficacy of his death was shewn; and speedily after his ascension, multitudes flocked to him, as doves to their windows.]

These things being necessary to the glorifying of himself, Jesus taught them with becoming earnestness—

II. The pleas with which he enforced it—

Our own necessity and God's glory are among the most powerful pleas which can be urged. Such were those with which our Lord enforced his petition;

1. His own necessity, "The hour is come"—

[The hour alluded to was the season of his sufferings and death. This had been fixed from eternity in the Divine counsels, and had been foretold and typified from the beginning of the world. Till its arrival, none of his enemies could lay hands on him; but now men and devils, yea, and God himself, were to concur in afflicting him. *What a weighty reason was this for his petition!* He had been ordained by the Father himself to those sufferings. The weight which he was to sustain was inconceivably great. The smallest failure on his part would defeat the end of his mission: nor could any thing less than the most miraculous testimonies counterbalance the offence of the cross. Under such circumstances, the Father could not but answer this seasonable request.]

2. His Father's glory—

[b] John xiii. 31.

[The Father's glory was deeply interested in the event of that hour. His justice was to be honoured, and a way was to be opened for the free exercise of his mercy. To effect this, was the great object of our Lord's desire, both in life and in death; and it was *this*, which, above all, stimulated him to present the petition before us[c]. *And could there possibly be a more weighty and prevailing argument?* The Father could not but desire the advancement of his own glory: he could not but wish his own eternal counsels fulfilled: he could not but approve the means which he himself had appointed to that end: he could not but delight to glorify his Son, who was, in such an humiliating way, endeavouring to glorify him.]

Let this SUBJECT lead us to view Jesus,

1. As our Saviour—

[For *us* did he agree that that dreadful hour should come; and to us he looks, that we may join with the Father in glorifying him. And shall we not glorify him, by trusting in his blood and righteousness? Shall we not proclaim to the whole world, that he is our only hope and refuge? O let him see of the travail of his soul! let him save us from the wrath to come!]

2. As our example—

[He knew, and could fully estimate the weight of, his impending sufferings. Nor could it fail but that his human nature should shrink back from them; yet he submitted to them, that his Father might be glorified[d].]

Let us in like manner be resigned to the trials that are allotted us—

[When our hour shall come, let us look to him as our example. Let us consider *Him*, lest we be weary and faint in our minds. Let us welcome whatever comes to us by the Divine appointment. Let us desire that God may be glorified in us, whether by life or death. Thus shall we be honoured and comforted in the midst of our sufferings; and after them be rewarded with a proportionable weight of glory.]

[c] As Elijah, at the hour of Evening Sacrifice, felt jealous for God's honour (1 Kings xviii. 36, 37), so did our Lord at this time.

[d] John xii. 27, 28.

OUTLINE NO. 1708

CHRIST'S POWER TO GIVE ETERNAL LIFE.

John xvii. *2. Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.*

WE have in these words an unbounded prospect from eternity to eternity: they present to our view

the commission first given by the Father to the Son; they exhibit the Son in due season pleading that commission, and finally executing it when the world shall be no more: they lead us to contemplate,

I. The power given to Christ—

As God, he possessed all power equally with the Father; but, as Mediator, he received his power from the Father. This power was,

1. Universal in its extent—

[Not only was the material world, with all the brute creation, subject to his will, but man; "power was given him over *all flesh*." His *enemies* are entirely under his controul: he restrains their violence[a], defeats their plots[b], and overrules their efforts for the accomplishment of his own eternal counsels[c] — — — His *friends* and people are his more especial care: he watches over them for good continually[d], succours them when tempted[e], strengthens them when weak[f], and accomplishes in them all the good pleasure of his goodness[g] — — —]

2. Infinite in its degree—

[There is nothing beyond the reach of his power. If he chose to annihilate the whole human race, he could effect it in a moment, by a simple act of volition. If, on the contrary, he would change them all into his own divine image, he could as easily create them all anew, as he at first produced them out of nothing. By making use of second causes indeed, he conceals his own agency: but there is nothing done in the whole creation, which does not originate in him, as the only source of wisdom and of strength.]

But we are yet more particularly interested in considering,

II. The end for which he was invested with it—

The Father gave to Christ an elect people—

[It is worthy of notice, that Christ, in this his intercessory prayer, speaks again and again of those who were "*given* him" by the Father. And, in truth, if the Father had not given to him a peculiar people, we have no reason to think that any would ever have given themselves to him, since there is not in fallen man either the inclination or the ability to do so[h]. They

[a] Ps. lxxvi. 10. [b] Job v. 12. [c] Ps. ii. 4.
[d] Ps. xxxiv. 15. [e] Heb. ii. 18. [f] 2 Cor. xii. 9.
[g] 2 Thess. i. 11. [h] Phil. ii. 13.

who do yield themselves up to him are "made willing in the day of God's power[i]," and in consequence of their having been "predestinated unto the adoption of children from before the foundation of the world[k]."]

To these "Christ gives eternal life"—

[The life of grace which is begun in their souls, is the gift of Christ[l]. The continuance of it is the effect of his continued communications[m]. Its consummation also is bestowed by him[n] without any merit in us, or any motive in himself, but a concern for his own, and his Father's glory[o]. Life, in every stage of it, both in this world and the next, is entirely his free gift. One is as much indebted to him for it as another: there will not be one in heaven that will not owe his salvation altogether to the merit of his blood, and to the efficacy of his grace.]

And for the accomplishment of this end he both received and exerts his power—

[It would have been to little purpose to have received from the Father an elect people, if he had not been invested also with power to secure them to himself. The Father well knew how many obstacles there would be to their salvation; and therefore he committed all power to his Son, that nothing might resist his will, or prevent the accomplishment of his eternal counsels. Jesus, thus qualified, orders every thing, both in heaven and earth, with an immediate reference to this great design. Events may sometimes appear to oppose his gracious intentions: but, as in a well-constructed watch the seemingly contrary movements all conduce to one end, so every dispensation, whether of providence or of grace, ultimately tends to his glory in our salvation[p].]

INFER—

1. What madness is it to neglect the Lord Jesus Christ!

[If any man have great preferments in his gift, he is sure to have many courting an interest in his favour. But the Lord Jesus Christ has eternal life to bestow upon us, and yet we can scarcely be induced to ask it at his hands. What strange infatuation! O let us awake from our slumbers, and implore of him the benefits he is so willing to confer.]

2. How great is the security which the Lord's people enjoy!

[i] Ps. cx. 3. [k] Eph. i. 4, 5. [l] John iv. 14. and vi. 51.
[m] Col. iii. 3, 4. [n] John xii. 32. and xiv. 19.
[o] John xiv. 13. [p] Rom. viii. 28.

[Jesus both possesses and exerts omnipotence in their behalf. What then have they to fear? Let them only secure his aid, and they defy both men and devils. "If he be for them, none can effectually be against them."]

3. What obligations do we lie under to love and serve the Lord!

[Is Jesus incessantly exerting his almighty power for us, and should not we employ our talents for him? O for a heart duly sensible of his love, and altogether devoted to his service!]

OUTLINE NO. 1709

OUR LORD'S DYING APPEAL TO GOD.

John xvii. 4, 5. *I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.*

A DYING scene, especially when the person is of an exalted character, creates in all a very deep interest, and calls forth a more than ordinary attention to every thing that he either says or does. But here we have a scene such as never occurred either before or since: it is no less than the dying scene, if I may so speak, of the Saviour of the world. "Father," says he, "the hour is come." Yes, "the time was come that he must depart out of this world, and go unto his Father." And here we are permitted to behold him in the attitude of prayer; and to hear his every petition, both for himself, and for his people to the very end of time. It is that part of his prayer which related more especially to himself, that will occupy our attention at this time. In it we notice,

I. His appeal to God—

The Lord Jesus, in his Mediatorial capacity, was a servant, sent by God to execute an appointed work: and, having executed it, he here appeals to God,

1. That "he had glorified God on earth"—

[This, in fact, had been the one end for which he had lived. He had glorified his Father *in his life;* every hour of

which had been devoted to the executing of his will, and to the promotion of his glory[a]. He had glorified him especially *in his doctrine.* Never once had he sought his own glory, but, on all occasions, the glory of Him who sent him[b]: and when he testified of himself, it was only as the person bearing a commission from the Father, and as sent by him to open for men *a way* of access to him as a reconciled God[c]. He had glorified him no less *by his miracles:* for though he wrought them by his own power, yet he always ascribed them to his Father, who had concurred with him in these exercises of omnipotence[d]; and thus he had constrained the beholders to acknowledge the Father in them[e]. But, above all, he had in *purpose,* though not in *act,* glorified his Father *in his death:* for in death he not only displayed the power of the Father, who upheld him under all his trials, but reflected honour on all the perfections of the Deity; causing them all to shine forth in united and harmonious splendour, and every attribute to appear more glorious than it could possibly have done in any other way. Hence, on the near approach of this great event, the Lord Jesus said, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him[f]."]

2. That "he had finished the work which God had given him to do"—

[This was a work which none but an incarnate God could ever have effected. For, first of all, he was *to expiate the sins of a ruined world.* This was to be done by offering himself a sacrifice for sin. And though this was not *literally* fulfilled in all its extent, till he died upon the cross, yet, in mind and intention, it was already done; and there were but a few hours to elapse before the mighty debt would be discharged, even to the uttermost farthing: so that justice itself would have nothing further to require of those who should plead the payment made by Him, as their Surety.

Next, he was perfectly *to fulfil the law of God;* so that all who should trust in him might have a perfect righteousness made over to them for their justification before God. And this also he did: for, though he was in circumstances of trial which far exceeded any that ever were sustained by mortal man, he never, either in word or thought, transgressed any one command: and all, not excepting even his bitterest enemies, were constrained to acknowledge that they could find no fault in him.

[a] John iv. 34. [b] John vii. 16. and xiv. 24. [c] John xiv. 6.
[d] John v. 36. [e] John xiv. 10. with Matt. ix. 8.
[f] John xiii. 31, 32.

Further, he was *to introduce and establish a new dispensation.* And this, too, he did; fulfilling and abrogating every part of the Mosaic Law; and erecting "a kingdom, which consisted not in meats and drinks and carnal ordinances, but in righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost[g]."

In a word, there was not any one part of his mediatorial work, so far as it could be completed at this time, that had not been accomplished: so that our Lord's appeal, in relation to it all, was just and true.]

From this appeal we proceed to notice,

II. His petition, founded upon it—

He had, in the commencement of this prayer, desired to be glorified on earth[h]: and now he requests that he may be glorified in heaven. He had from all eternity possessed a glory with the Father—

[From eternity had he "been in the bosom of the Father[i]." In truth, he was one with the Father: for that very "Word which was made flesh, was in the beginning with God, and was God[k]." Yes; "being in the form of God, and thinking it not robbery to be equal with God, he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross[l]." This he did for the purpose of accomplishing the work he had undertaken, the work of redeeming and saving a ruined world. But, having done all that was necessary for the effecting of this great purpose,]

He desired to resume the glory, which for a season he had laid aside—

[Not only did he desire that his humiliation, *as God*, should cease; but that his exaltation, *as man*, should commence; and that, in his human-nature, he might possess all the dignity and glory to which it was entitled by its union with the Godhead. It had been the instrument of effecting Jehovah's purposes; and therefore it was right that it should participate the glory of that divine nature to which it was united, and in connexion with which it had accomplished this great work. And now, agreeably to this request, that God-man, who died upon the cross, is "highly exalted, and has a name given to him above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things

[g] Rom. xiv. 17. [h] ver. 1. [i] John i. 18.
[k] John i. 1, 14. [l] Phil. ii. 6—8.

in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father[m]." On the very throne of God the human-nature sits: for Jesus there appears as "a Lamb that has been slain[n]:" and there does he receive the praises both of men and angels, on a perfect equality with the Father[o]. And though the time will come when the mediatorial office will cease, and the kingdom established by means of it will be given up to the Father[p]; yet to all eternity will Jesus be the Head of his elect people, the acknowledged Author of all their bliss, and, together with the Father, the object of universal adoration.]

Whilst we thus view the Saviour in his last moments, we may LEARN from his dying words much which respects his followers:

1. The ground of their hopes—

[What hope has any man but what is founded altogether on the finished work of Christ? Had he left any part of his work undone, not a human being could ever have been saved. What if his atonement had been incomplete? What if he had not wrought out a perfect righteousness? What if he had not gone to heaven to carry on the work which he began on earth? Is there one amongst us that could have supplied the least deficiency? But, thanks be to God! there is no need of any thing to be added to His all-perfect work. There is in Christ a sufficiency, not for us only, but also for the whole world: nor shall any soul that relies on Him ever perish. Only let our reliance on him be simple, and without the least mixture of self-dependence, and we have nothing to fear; for "He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him."]

2. The object of their life—

[Every Christian has the very same end in view as Jesus himself had; even to "glorify God on earth, and to finish the work which God has given him to do." In these respects Christ is an example to us; and every one of his followers is bound to "walk as he walked." See then, brethren, that ye maintain this character, and that "there be in you the same mind as was in your Saviour Christ." If ye be his indeed, ye will make this the one object of your life, to glorify your God and Father. Every day brings with it its appointed work, which it becomes you to execute with all fidelity; that, when your last hour shall arrive, you may be able, amidst all your short-comings and defects, to say, 'Father, sinful as I am, and conscious of

[m] Phil. ii. 9—11.
[n] Rev. v. 6.
[o] Rev. v. 13.
[p] 1 Cor. xv. 28.

innumerable infirmities, yet I can with humility *appeal* to thee, that I have, according to the grace given me, endeavoured to "glorify thee on earth, and to finish the work which thou hast given me to do."]

3. The end of their labours—

[For every faithful follower of Christ is a recompence reserved, even glory and honour and immortality, at the right hand of God. Yes, in a dying hour the true Christian may look up with confidence, and say, '"Now, Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory" that I shall have with thee when this world shall no longer exist. To this recompence have I had respect; and for the hope of it I have willingly resigned all that this world could give me; yea, and cheerfully endured also all that thine enemies have been permitted to inflict: and now do I welcome death itself, that I may enter into the joy of my Lord, and be for ever with my God.' Dear brethren, only follow your Saviour in the exercise of faith and love; and his glory shall be your glory, his kingdom your kingdom, for ever and ever.]

OUTLINE NO. 1710

THE OBJECTS OF OUR LORD'S INTERCESSION.

John xvii. 9, 10. *I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them.*

THE Apostles were but weak in knowledge or in grace till the day of Pentecost; nevertheless, they were greatly beloved by their Lord and Master. He declared in their hearing that they were true believers[a]. He testified also that they were the peculiar objects for whom he prayed.

I. For whom our Lord interceded—

The Disciples of Christ are characterized as persons "given" him by the Father—

[This is a just description of every child of God: none would ever give themselves to Christ, if they were not previously given to him by the Father; or come to Christ, if they were not drawn to him by the Father[b]. As every grace we possess must be traced to the operations of the Spirit, as its

[a] ver. 6—8. [b] John vi. 44.

immediate cause[c], so must it be traced to the electing love of God, as its primary and original source[d]. And it is of great importance, both for our humiliation and for God's glory, that this matter should be clearly known and understood[e].]

It was for these more especially that Jesus interceded—

[We apprehend that the apparent exclusion of the world from his intercessions is not to be understood strictly and positively, but only in a comparative sense[f]: but certainly the saints were the objects whom, both in this and all other intercessions, he had principally in view. The high-priest, in bearing the names of the twelve tribes upon his breast-plate whenever he went within the vail, was a type of Christ in this particular[g]. Christ would not be a high-priest, if he omitted this part of his office; since intercession was no less necessary to that office than oblation: but he does intercede for his people, and lives in heaven, as it were, for that very purpose[h]. Yes; He that formed the universe, and upholds it by his power, and whose petitions are commands, says, "I pray for them." And the petitions he then offered for his living disciples had respect to all his believing people, even to the end of the world[i].]

This distinguishing favour, however, was not conferred without reason—

II. Why he interceded for them in particular—

The reasons of the Divine procedure are in many cases inscrutable; but our Lord condescended to state some on this occasion—

1. Believers are the Father's property, "They are thine"—

[All things belong to God as his creatures; but believers are his in a far higher sense. He has made them his by adoption: he has confirmed his interest in them by regeneration: he esteems them as his peculiar treasure[k], in comparison of

[c] 1 Cor. iv. 7. Gal. v. 22. [d] Eph. i. 4, 5.

[e] This description of God's people is repeated *five times* in seven verses. See ver. 6—12. Was there no design in this? and is there nothing to be gathered from it?

[f] In this respect it resembles Hos. vi. 6: for our Lord did pray for the ungodly world, Luke xxiii. 34. and had their good in view even in this very prayer, ver. 21.

[g] Exod. xxviii. 9—12, 29, 30. [h] Heb. ix. 24. and vii. 25.

[i] ver. 20. [k] Ps. cxxxv. 4.

whom the whole universe is as nothing in his eyes. Hence our Lord interested himself more particularly on their behalf. His zeal for his Father's glory would not suffer him to be for one moment unmindful of their interests.]

2. Christ himself has an equal propriety in them, "All mine," &c.

[They belong to Christ by the Father's donation, by his own purchase, and by the closest possible union[l] — — — Will he then be regardless of this precious gift, and lose the purchase of his blood, and suffer his own members to perish, for want of his continual intercession? Surely his interest in them is a very sufficient reason for his unwearied solicitude respecting them.]

3. Christ is glorified in them—

[The ungodly world bring no glory to Christ; but it is the labour and delight of his people to glorify him. He is glorified now in their faith, love, worship, and obedience: he will be glorified and admired *in* them at his second coming[m]: he will be glorified *by* them to all eternity. While therefore he has any concern for his own glory, he cannot but be studious of their welfare.]

INFER—

1. How honourable a character is the true Christian!

[The Christian is eminently distinguished from all the rest of the world. He is highly esteemed both by the Father and by Christ, who equally claim him as their property, "He is mine;" "he is mine." He is interested in all which Christ has done or is now doing. How infinitely does this honour exceed that which cometh of man! Let every one be ambitious to attain it: nor let any earthly attainments whatever satisfy our desires.]

2. How secure and blessed is his state!

[There may be some who shall never be benefited by the Saviour's intercession; but Christ's people are continually remembered by him before the throne. They therefore are sure to have every want supplied; nor can any defeat the purposes of their blessed Lord. Let therefore every Christian rejoice and glory in the Lord: let the thought of Christ's intercession dissipate all fears of condemnation[n]: let Christ be viewed as an Advocate under every fresh-contracted guilt[o]: let every one seek to glorify him, and to be glorified with him.]

[l] They are one body with him, Eph. v. 30. and one Spirit, 1 Cor. vi. 17.

[m] 2 Thess. i. 10. [n] Rom. viii. 34. [o] 1 John ii. 1.

OUTLINE NO. 1711

PRESERVATION FROM SIN MORE DESIRABLE THAN DELIVERANCE FROM AFFLICTION.

John xvii. 15. *I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.*

WE admire the solicitude which a dying parent expresses for the future and eternal welfare of his children; nor can we easily shake off the concern which such a spectacle creates in our minds. Such a scene, but incomparably more affecting, is here presented to our view. The Saviour of the world was unmindful of his own impending sorrows, and was altogether occupied with the concerns of his Church and people. Having given his last instructions to his Disciples, he poured out his soul in prayer for them. One of the principal subjects of his prayer is specified in the text.

We shall consider,

I. What our Lord prayed for on behalf of his Disciples—

He prayed "*not* that they should be taken out of the world"—

[He had just declared that the world hated his Disciples. Hence we might suppose that he should wish them to be taken out of the world; and many reasons might have been urged by him to enforce such a request. God had often taken away his beloved people in a signal manner[a]: he speaks of a sudden removal in evil times as a favour to them[b]. He would hereby manifest his indignation against the world for crucifying his Son; and our Lord might then have carried his Disciples with him as trophies. Nor can we doubt but that such a measure would have been extremely pleasing to his Disciples.

But on the whole such a petition would have been inexpedient; first, *on account of the world.* The Disciples were to be the instructors of mankind[c], and to be living examples of true piety[d]. They were also to intercede on behalf of their fellow-creatures; but, if they were taken away together with our Lord, their commission could not be executed, and the world

[a] Heb. xi. 5. 2 Kings ii. 11.
[b] Isai. lvii. 1.
[c] Matt. xxviii. 19.
[d] Matt. v. 14.

would lose the benefit of their instructions and prayers. What an inconceivable loss would this have been both to Jews and Gentiles! Yea, in what a state of ignorance should we ourselves have been at this moment!

Next, it would have been inexpedient *on God's account*, if I may so speak. The Disciples were to be, like the dispossessed Gadarene, monuments of God's mercy[e]. They were to exemplify in their own persons the all-sufficiency of Divine grace under every situation. They were to be instruments also whereby the eternal counsels of the Deity were to be accomplished: their removal therefore would have robbed God himself of his glory.

Lastly, it would have been inexpedient *on account of the Disciples themselves*. They would have been glad to have accompanied their Lord; but it would not have been for their advantage at that time. Their reward was to be proportioned to their labours and sufferings[f]. If they had been taken away at that time they had done but little for God; consequently they would not have possessed so bright a crown as they now do. How glad are they *now* that their abode on earth was prolonged!]

The request which our Lord offered for them was far better—

[He prayed that they might be kept from the evil of it. Satan is by way of eminence called "the evil one." He is incessantly plotting the destruction of God's chosen people[g], and our Lord might have respect to their preservation from *him*[h]; but he rather refers to the moral evil that is in the world. And there was good reason why he should pray for their deliverance from *that*.

The temptations they would have to encounter were innumerable. Their poverty might beget impatience and discontent; their persecutions might provoke them to retaliation and revenge; their incessant danger of a violent death might tempt them to apostasy. They were to have innumerable trials from without and from within: how needful then was it that they should have an almighty Keeper!

They were utterly unable of themselves to withstand the smallest temptation. The Disciples were altogether men of like passions with ourselves; nor had they any more sufficiency in themselves than the weakest of us[i]. The most confident of them fell, as soon as he boasted of his strength[k]. Almighty

[e] Luke viii. 39. [f] 1 Cor. iii. 8. [g] 1 Pet. v. 8.

[h] Ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ — Satan is often called ὁ πονηρὸς. Eph. vi. 16. and 1 John v. 18.

[i] 2 Cor. iii. 5. [k] Matt. xxvi. 33, 35, 74.

power was *then*, as well as *now*, necessary to keep any man from falling[l]. How kind then was our Lord's solicitude to interest his Father in their behalf!

Their fall would be attended with the most pernicious consequences. It would open the mouths of their adversaries, and cause them to blaspheme[m]. It would utterly destroy all hopes of success in their own ministry; and, even if they should be recovered, and saved at last, they would be deprived of a great part of their reward[n]. Hence our Lord's request was the best that could be offered for them.]

Hence we may see,

II. What we should mainly desire for ourselves—

An exemption from the troubles and calamities of life, however desirable in some points of view, is not greatly to be coveted. St. Paul, it is true, "desired to depart and to be with Christ:" but it was *not in order to get rid of his trials*, but that he might have full possession of the glory which awaited him; *not that he, his earthly tabernacle, might be unclothed*, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life[o]." But

To be preserved from "the corruptions that are in the world through lust[p]" is most desirable—

[The snares with which we are surrounded in this vain world are very many, and replete with danger. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," are soliciting us continually, and presenting temptations to us exceeding difficult to be withstood — — — Even though we may have withstood them manfully for a season, we are yet in danger of being overcome by them at last, and of perishing thereby with an aggravated weight of guilt and condemnation[q]. So eminent a character was Demas, that St. Paul himself, a good judge of characters, twice united him with St. Luke in his salutations to the Churches: yet of him it is said, "Demas hath forsaken us, having loved this present world[r]." Who then can hope to stand, if he be not upheld by the Almighty power of God? Truly it is God alone who is "able to keep us from falling[s]:" and therefore we should make our supplications to him continually for that end.]

For the obtaining of this mercy it is not possible for us to be too importunate—

[l] Jude, ver. 24, 25. [m] 2 Sam. xii. 14. [n] 1 Cor. iii. 15.
[o] 2 Cor. v. 4. [p] 2 Pet. i. 4. [q] 2 Pet. ii. 20.
[r] 2 Tim. iv. 10. [s] Jude, ver. 24.

[It was in order to this end that Christ himself came into the world, and died upon the cross: "He gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father[t]." And to produce this blessed effect is the great scope and tendency of his Gospel: "By the cross alone it is that the world is crucified unto us, and we unto the world[u]." In fact, there is not a person upon earth that ever gets a victory over the world, except by faith in Christ[x]. On the other hand, every one that is really born of God does gain this victory[y]. And this is the distinguishing character of all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity; they all resemble him in this particular, "not being of the world, even as he was not of the world[z]." If then we would reign with Christ hereafter, we must resemble him now; and never cease to implore help from God, that the world and all its lusts may, in answer to our prayers, be put for ever under our feet.]

In CONCLUSION I would say,

1. Learn to form a right estimate of the world—

[It is, in fact, a wilderness, through which we are to pass to the promised land; and we are but pilgrims passing through it, or sojourners taking up our residence in it for a few days at most. Whether we have a more or less gratifying accommodation in it, is a matter of small moment. We are going to our Father's house, where we shall possess all that our souls can wish; and present things are only of importance as they advance or retard our meetness for our heavenly inheritance. The instant that we have arrived at our journey's end, we shall see what judgment we ought to have formed of the world, and every thing in it. Let us anticipate that judgment now; and we shall rise superior to the attractions of all created things, and to the solicitations of every unhallowed appetite—]

2. Seek to have, in reference to it, "the same mind as was in Christ Jesus"—

[In asking for you a preservation from the snares of the world, he judged right. He wished not to abridge your happiness, but to promote it. And, if *we* call upon you to renounce the world, and all its lusts, we are not Cynics, as you are apt to imagine, but your best and truest friends. Even when all his own sufferings were coming upon him, the Saviour, forgetful of himself, implored this blessing for you. And if I were never to address you more, I would, with all earnestness, urge this duty on you, and implore this blessing on your

[t] Gal. i. 4. [u] Gal. vi. 14. [x] 1 John v. 5.
[y] 1 John v. 4. [z] ver. 14, 16.

behalf. You can only be happy in proportion as you rise above this world to the pursuit and enjoyment of heavenly things. Look at the Saviour, and see how superior he was to all the things of time and sense. That is the state I wish you to attain; and the more you resemble him now, the richer shall be your enjoyment of his presence in a better world —]

OUTLINE NO. 1712

CHRISTIANS ARE NOT OF THE WORLD.

John xvii. 16. *They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*

SUCH is the enmity of a carnal mind to the will and law of God, that men usually hate us most for those very things which render us most acceptable in the sight of God. The sanctity of Abel was the real ground of the inveterate hatred that rankled in the breast of Cain, and that impelled him to destroy his brother whom he could not imitate. And David in his day complained, that when he put on sackcloth and chastened his soul with fasting, pleasing as that conduct must have been to God, profane scoffers turned it to his reproach. Thus our Lord told his Disciples that the world would hate them because they did not conform themselves to its habits: but at the same time, repeating what he had spoken of their holy singularity, he pleads it as an argument with his heavenly Father to interpose more effectually for their preservation from evil, and their sanctification through his truth[a]. The assertion before us leads us to shew,

I. In what respects Christ was not of the world—

Our Lord fulfilled with the utmost exactness all his social and relative duties, and wrought, till the age of thirty, at his father's trade[b]. But though he filled up his proper station *in* the world, he was not *of* the world,

1. In his spirit and temper—

[A levity of mind, a disregard of God, and an indifference about eternal things, characterize the generality of mankind.

[a] ver. 14—17. [b] Mark vi. 3.

But no such disposition was ever seen in our adorable Emmanuel. A holy gravity invariably marked his demeanour: he had a continual sense of the Divine presence, a deep impression of the importance of time, and an unremitting zeal to finish the work assigned him: "It was his meat and drink to do the will of him that sent him."]

2. In his desires and pursuits—

[The world affect nothing but the things of time and sense: pleasure, riches, and honour are the idols which they worship. But our Lord desired none of these things. Had he wished for *pleasure*, he had a mind and body framed for the most exquisite delights of which our nature is capable: as his bodily organs were not weakened by any sinful habit, so his intellectual faculties were capable of comprehending all the wonders of creation, and of deriving the sublimest pleasure from the contemplation of them. But he was occupied with thoughts widely different from these: he found no time for the amusing speculations of philosophers. He had come to atone for sin; and, that he might do so, chose rather to be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Had he desired *riches*, how easily could he, who commanded a fish to bring him a piece of money to pay his tax, have possessed himself of inexhaustible stores of silver and gold! But he chose rather to be destitute even of a place where to lay his head, and to be a pensioner upon the bounty of some pious women[c]. He did indeed carry a purse, but it was not for the procuring of superfluities for himself, but that he might administer to the necessities of the poor. Had he been ambitious of *honour*, with what crowds of followers might he have been attended, all of them monuments of his tender compassion and almighty power! But he dismissed them from him, and frequently with the most solemn charges, that they should tell no man what he had done for them: and when the people would have taken him by force to make him a king, he rendered himself invisible, and withdrew from them. So little did he covet what the foolish world admire; and so different was he from the world in the whole of his deportment.]

Singular as he appeared in his day, it will be found,

II. That his Disciples all resemble him—

The followers of Christ, whatever attainments they may have made, were once "walking after the course of this world even as others:" but the very instant that they obtain a saving knowledge of their Lord,

[c] Luke viii. 3. and ix. 58.

they begin to tread in his steps and imitate his example[d]: "as they have once borne the image of their earthly father, they now bear the image of the heavenly."

1. They indulge not a worldly spirit—

[Believers are not free from the imperfections of their former state: their constitutional or acquired habits still in some measure remain: hence one is yet too easily drawn aside to levity, another to earthly-mindedness, and all to the "sins which most easily beset them:" but this is their pain, their grief, their burthen: they desire from their inmost souls to be delivered from such a spirit: though they too often fall into it, they would not *indulge* it; they would far rather have their souls nourished with spiritual blessings; and would account it an infinitely richer mercy to receive an increase of grace and peace, than to enjoy all the wealth or pleasure that the world can bestow.]

2. Nor do they affect worldly company—

[From their situations in social life they are necessitated to have much intercourse with the men of this world: but they regard the world as a physician does an hospital which it is his office to attend: they consider it as the theatre on which they are called to act; and they endeavour to approve themselves to God and to their fellow-creatures by a diligent discharge of their duty: while in it, they seek the good of those around them, and study to improve themselves by all which they see: but they take not up their abode there; they are glad to retire from it when their work is finished: their friends and companions are selected from among another people; their "delight is in the saints that are in the earth, and in such as excel in virtue:" they shew by their conduct that "light cannot have communion with darkness, nor Christ with Belial, nor he that believeth with an unbeliever[e]:" and, like Moses, they would rather suffer affliction with the people of God than participate the pleasures and honours of a court[f].]

3. Nor are they engrossed with worldly pursuits—

[They are not indifferent about the things of this world, nor are they of necessity precluded from the enjoyment of them when God in his providence casts them into their lap: they may even seek these things in subordination and subserviency to their more important concerns. But they will not be *engrossed* with such mean pursuits: they will not suffer their affections to be set on such worthless objects: their

[d] Gal. vi. 14. [e] 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15. [f] Heb. xi. 24—26.

hearts are in heaven, and their "conversation also is in heaven." They seek "pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore;" they labour to be "rich towards God in faith and good works;" and they aspire after "the honour that cometh of God," the honour of being "children of God, yea, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." And though much time and thought is spent by them in things relating to the world, yet when at liberty to follow the bent of their minds, they return to God as their beloved, their only, rest.]

We shall conclude the subject with some suitable ADVICE—

1. Guard against the self-deception which too generally prevails—

[We have reason at this time to adopt the Apostle's words, and say, that "many walk, of whom we have told you often, and tell you now even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, and that their end will be destruction, because they *mind* earthly things[g]." There are, alas! too many who "call Christ, Lord, Lord, but will not obey his commands," or "walk as he walked." But let us remember, that "the tree must be known by its fruits;" and that we must judge of our interest in Christ by our conformity to his image: if our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows, be excited *principally* by worldly things, we certainly are of the world: but if, with Christ, we be "crucified to the world," and our spirit and temper, our desires and pursuits, resemble his, then, and then only, may we conclude, that we are Christ's; for "all that are born of God have overcome the world; and all that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts[h]."]

2. Be not afraid of a necessary singularity—

[We would not recommend a *needless* singularity, or insinuate that there is any virtue in making ourselves appear ridiculous; but whereinsoever the world deviate from the mind and will of God, there we may, and *must* differ from them. If we be singular, the fault will be theirs and not ours. No blame can attach to our Lord because he was singular; nor can it to us while we "shine as lights in a dark world," "holding forth in our conduct the word of life." We should "make our light to shine before men," and be "as a city set upon a hill;" and though the besotted world will "gaze strangely at us, and wonder that we run not with them to their excess of riot," we shall have enough to counterbalance

[g] Phil. iii. 18, 19. [h] 1 John v. 4. Gal. v. 24.

their contempt in the testimony of our own consciences, and in the approbation of our God. We know that it is our duty to despise all the vanities which the world can offer us[i], and that, if we would not be found enemies of God in the last day, we must relinquish all desire after that friendship of the world, which is enmity with God[k]: let us therefore go on boldly in the way of duty, and if we meet with a cross in our road, let us not turn aside from it, but take it up and glory in it.]

3. Seek more and more conformity to the Saviour's image—

[The command of God is, "Be not comformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds." The way in which we are to comply with this command is set before us in our Lord's example. We are not indeed to attempt the things which were peculiar to him as a Prophet of the Most High God; but to get the same mind which was in him; to imitate him in his spirit and temper, and to manifest the same superiority to things visible and temporal, and the same decided preference for things invisible and eternal: then, like the higher regions of the atmosphere, we shall remain serene, while those who grovel on the earth are agitated by incessant tempests. "Come out then from the world, and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and God will be a father unto you, and ye shall be his sons and daughters[l]:" and know that the more your conversation is in heaven now, the greater will be your meetness for it whenever you shall be called hence.]

[i] 1 John ii. 15, 16. [k] Jam. iv. 4. [l] 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

OUTLINE NO. 1713

THE END FOR WHICH CHRIST DEDICATED HIMSELF TO GOD.

John xvii. 19. *For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.*

THE sanctification of men is no less necessary for their usefulness in this world, than it is for their happiness in the world to come. Hence our blessed Lord, in his intercessory prayer, made this a very prominent subject of his requests in behalf of his Disciples whom he was about to leave in the midst of an ensnaring world: "sanctify them through thy truth:

thy word is truth[a]." And for the encouragement of all his followers to the latest period of the world he declares, that the attainment of this object in their behalf has been a very principal end of all that he ever had done, or was at that instant doing, for them: "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified through the truth."

In opening to you these words I will shew,

I. What is that act to which our Lord here refers—

To "sanctify" means to purify from sin, and to devote to God. In the former sense it may be properly applied to men: but it is in the latter sense only that it can have any reference to Christ.

Under the Mosaic law the priests and all the vessels of the sanctuary were sanctified to the Lord[b]. The offerings there made, all shadowed forth the Lord Jesus Christ, who sanctified and set apart himself to the work of saving a ruined world. This he did,

1. When he first undertook our cause—

[From eternity he entered into covenant with the Father to redeem our souls by his own obedience unto death: and the utter insufficiency of all other sacrifices being acknowledged, he engaged to offer himself a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world[c] — — —]

2. When he assumed our nature—

[St. Paul cites the foregoing passage with an express reference to "*the time of Christ's coming into the world:*" and there is a remarkable variation in his language suited to that occasion. In the Psalm it is said, "Mine ear hast thou opened;" referring to the law which ordained that a servant who devoted himself for ever to the service of his Master, should "have his ear bored through with an awl[d]:" but in the Epistle it is said, "a body hast thou prepared me[e]." At his incarnation therefore he sanctified himself afresh to this great work.]

3. When he submitted to the baptism of John—

[John wished to decline the office of baptizing so exalted a person. But, on entering upon the office assigned him, the Lord Jesus Christ judged it necessary to consecrate himself to it afresh by this solemn ordinance, in which he was openly and

[a] ver. 17. [b] Exod. xxx. 26—29. [c] Ps. xl. 6—8.
[d] Exod. xxi. 5, 6. [e] Heb. x. 5—7.

ostensibly devoted unto God: "Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness[f]."]

4. When he went up to Jerusalem in order to his crucifixion—

[The paschal lamb was to be separated and set apart four days, in order to its being fully ascertained by the most accurate examination, that it was without spot or blemish, and therefore fit to be offered in sacrifice to God[g]. And on the fourth day previous to his crucifixion did our blessed Lord go up to Jerusalem, that after the strictest examination his very judges might proclaim his innocence, and consequently his fitness for the work assigned him, of making an atonement for the sins of the whole world. And his persisting in his work in opposition to all the dictates of suffering humanity, shewed that on this occasion also he sanctified himself to the office he had undertaken[h]."]

5. When he surrendered up himself into the hands of his murderers—

[He beat them all to the ground, when they came to apprehend him; to shew that he could with his word have struck them all dead upon the spot[i]. He took care also to exempt his Disciples from a participation of his lot, because their work was scarcely yet begun. But himself he resigned into the hands of sinners, in order that all which he had undertaken to do and suffer might be accomplished in him.]

Having seen what the act was, let me shew,

II. What light his performance of it throws upon his character—

There was a most mysterious composition in his character—

[All others, even Aaron himself, were sanctified through the instrumentality of one appointed to that office: but Christ "*sanctified himself*." He was at the same time the Sacrifice, and the Priest that offered it, and the Altar on which it was offered[k].]

And this it was which gave his offering its efficacy—

[Had he been a mere man, his sacrifice could never have availed for the redemption of the world. But he was God and man in one person: and his divinity, whilst it gave an infinite value to his sacrifice, both qualified and authorized him to present himself a sacrifice to God. Both his body and soul

[f] Matt. iii. 15. [g] Exod. xii. 3, 6. [h] John xii. 12, 13, 27, 28.
[i] John xviii. 4—8. [k] Heb. xiii. 10.

were alike offered; the one to endure all that was due to our bodies, the other, all that was due to our souls. And his was, not a typical offering, like those presented under the law, but a real and true propitiation for sin. Nor did his sacrifice avail for a typical and temporary remission of sins, but for the full and everlasting forgiveness of all sin[l]——— Thus the expression in my text, whilst it seems to convey nothing very particular to the mind, gives us, in reality, an insight into the deepest mysteries of our religion, and shews, that it was God who purchased the Church with his own blood[m]."]

Stupendous in this view, was the act to which he referred. But let us consider,

III. What his ends were in the performance of it—

Generally, it was for the sake of his people that he did this. But *particularly*, it was, "that they might be sanctified through the truth."

The sanctification of his people was a very principal end which he aimed at in all that he did and suffered for them—

[His people must be sanctified unto the Lord, even as he was. The different vessels of the sanctuary, no less than the offerings presented there, were altogether devoted to the Lord. In like manner must the disciples of Christ be sanctified. In this view they are called "a kind of first-fruits," which could on no account, and in no degree, be alienated from the Lord[n]. Nay more, we are called to "offer up our whole selves living sacrifices unto the Lord, as a reasonable and acceptable service[o]." And that we might be thus sanctified was the great end of all that our blessed Lord either did or suffered for us: "he gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works[p]." And the very same object he still keeps in view in all that he is at this moment doing for us in heaven[q].]

This however must be accomplished through the instrumentality of his word—

[His Holy Spirit indeed is the agent, without whom not even the word itself would produce any good effect. But he is pleased to make use of his word as the means of quickening us to a heavenly life[r], and of carrying on his work where it is begun[s], and of completing it even to the end[t]. His word is

[l] Heb. ix. 13, 14. [m] Acts xx. 28. [n] Jam. i. 18.
[o] Rom. xii. 1. [p] Tit. ii. 14. [q] Rom. xiv. 9.
[r] 1 Pet. i. 23. [s] 1 Pet. ii. 2. [t] 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

the mould into which we are to be cast[u], and by which we shall be altogether changed into the divine image. This is the state to which he desires to bring us; and by his word ministered unto us, "he will turn us from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God[x]."]

OBSERVE now from hence,

1. How great is the love of Christ to fallen man!—

[He well knew all that he must endure if he would become a substitute and surety for fallen man: yet he undertook our cause, and came down from heaven for us, and never ceased from his work till he could say, "It is finished"———Methinks the ox and the ass may well reproach our more than brutish ingratitude[y]———]

2. What obligations have we to holiness!—

[By holiness I mean, a total surrender of ourselves to God. And if we aspire not after this, what do we but pour contempt upon all that Christ has done and suffered for us, and cause him, as far as lies in our power, to have "sanctified himself" in vain. What excuse shall we offer for this when he shall cáll us into judgment? Verily if, being "called to be saints," we be not found so at the last day, it would be better for us never to have heard of Christ at all———]

3. What guilt do they contract who turn back from the service of their God!—

[As Aaron and his sons were sanctified with the blood of the Mosaic covenant[z], so are we with the blood of the Christian covenant. And, "if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, we do, in fact, tread under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant wherewith we have been sanctified an unholy thing, and do despite unto the Spirit of grace." What then awaits us in the eternal world? The despisers of Moses' law died *without mercy:* but a *much sorer punishment* will come on us, even the everlasting wrath of our offended God[a]——— O let not any of you turn back unto perdition; but be of those who believe unto the saving of their souls[b].]

[u] Rom. vi. 17. the Greek.
[x] Acts xxvi. 18.
[y] Isai. i. 3.
[z] Lev. viii. 30.
[a] Heb. x. 26—29.
[b] Heb. x. 38, 39.

OUTLINE NO. 1714

THE IMPORTANCE OF UNION AMONG CHRISTIANS.

John xvii. 20, 21. *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*

IN the former part of this chapter our Lord has been interceding principally for his own immediate Disciples: but here he intercedes for all his people to the end of time. Who the particular persons were, is known only when the word of God reaches their hearts, and they are made obedient to the faith of Christ. But the substance of the petition is evidently most important; because our Lord had before made the same request in behalf of his own Disciples; and because he repeats it again more strongly in the two verses following our text.

We will endeavour to shew,

I. What is that union which Christ prayed for in our behalf—

If we should interpret the union spoken of in ver. 11, as relating only to the testimony which the Apostles were to bear concerning Christ, still we cannot possibly limit the import of the text to that sense: the terms are too varied and too strong to admit of such a limitation. The comparison instituted between Christ's union with the Father, and ours with each other in him, leads our thoughts into a far different channel; a channel mysterious indeed, but deeply fraught with the richest instruction. Christ is one with the Father, *in essence* and *in operation;* being "the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his person," and at the same time acting in every thing in perfect concert with the Father, having no will but *his*, speaking nothing but according to *his* commands, doing nothing but by *his* direction, and seeking only the glory of *his* name.

This fitly illustrates the union which his people have with each other in and through him:

1. They are formed into one body—

[Sometimes they are represented as a temple, composed of living stones, and having a living stone for its foundation, even Jesus Christ himself; and built up as an habitation for God himself[a]. At other times they are spoken of as a body, of which Christ is the Head, and all the different individuals are members[b]. Thus whilst they are united with each other, they are united also with the Father and the Son: "the Father is in Christ, and Christ is in them; and thus they are made perfect in one," ever "growing up into Christ as their Head," and contributing to each other's perfection, till they arrive at "the full measure of the stature of Christ[c]."

How earnestly the Lord Jesus Christ desired this, may be gathered from the frequent repetition of it before noticed: and well he might plead for it in this manner, since the accomplishment of it was the principal design of his death[d], and the great end of God the Father in the whole economy of redemption[e].]

2. They are all animated by one Spirit—

["He that is joined to the Lord," says the Apostle, "is one Spirit[f]." This is true of every individual, and of the whole collective body of believers. "Christ dwells in all of them;" and "as Christ himself lived by the Father, so do they live by him[g]." Hence, as there is no distraction in the body, but, in consequence of its being under the controul of one living and governing principle, its powers are all harmoniously exerted for the attainment of the same object; so the members of Christ's mystical body are one in *sentiment*, in *affection*, and in *the scope and tenour of their lives*.

In *sentiment* they are one: for though, in matters of inferior moment, there may be a wide difference between them, yet in the fundamental points, such as our fall in Adam, our recovery by Christ, our renovation by the Spirit, the evil of sin, the beauty of holiness, the security of believers, and many other points connected with the spiritual life, there is no difference: all that are taught of God agree in these things; or, if they differ a little in modes of expression, when disputing for opinions, they agree perfectly when they come upon their knees before God; which shews that their differences are rather

[a] 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5. Eph. ii. 20—22.
[b] 1 Cor. xii. 12, 13, 27.
[c] Eph. iv. 13, 15. 16.
[d] John xi. 51, 52.
[e] Eph. i. 9, 10.
[f] 1 Cor. vi. 17
[g] Eph. iii. 17. Col. iii. 4. John vi. 56, 57.

imaginary than real. There is "an unity of faith" to which they all come[h]; and which the untutored Indian attains as easily as the most learned philosopher; for it is learned by the *heart* rather than the *head;* and it is God alone that can guide us to the knowledge of it[i].

In *affection* also they are one, being "kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love," and "loving one another with a pure heart fervently." They are all "taught of God to do so[k]." What the real tendency of Christianity is may be seen in the effects produced on the first Christians[l]: and if there is not the same measure of love among Christians of the present day, it is not owing to any want of efficacy in the grace of God, but to the slender measure in which it is possessed: for, in proportion as the grace of Christ abounds in the soul, will ever be the measure of our faith and love[m].

Moreover, in *the scope and tenour of their lives* also they are one. They all acknowledge the Scriptures as the one directory which they are to follow; and, according to their several attainments, "they walk by the same rule[n]"— — — Without this, all other "unity," whether "in the faith," or "in the Spirit," is of no avail.

This "holding of the Head" by faith, this ministering to each other by love, and this progressive increase of the whole body in the ways of holiness, constitutes that true union which the Gospel produces, and which our Lord so earnestly desired in our behalf[o].]

Let us now consider,

II. The unspeakable importance of it—

Truly it is of the utmost importance: for on it depends,

I. The honour of Christ—

[In the days of the Apostles, the Messiahship of Christ was abundantly proved by the most stupendous miracles wrought in confirmation of it. But it was the design of God, that, when Christianity was once established, it should carry its own evidence along with it, and convince men by producing such effects in the world as would demonstrate to all its Divine origin. The perfect consistency which there was in the testimony of all the Apostles and of the first teachers of Christianity shewed, that they must have been inspired by the same Spirit; who kept them all from error, and guided them into all truth. In the whole apostolic age we read of but one

[h] Eph. iv. 13. [i] 1 Cor. ii. 14. [k] 1 Thess. iv. 9.
[l] Acts ii. 44, 45. and iv. 32. [m] 1 Tim. i. 14. Eph. iv. 3, 4, 7.
[n] Phil. iii. 16. Gal. vi. 16. [o] Col. ii. 19.

point of difference that arose, namely, Whether the believing Gentiles should be required to submit to circumcision or not; and even that was discussed, not for the satisfaction of any of the Apostles, but only of some of the less-enlightened converts. And the agreement which there was in doctrine, was rendered still more manifest by the wonderful unity which was displayed in the life and conversation of the whole Church. There were indeed spots and blemishes in many; but these were reproved by the authorised teachers of religion, and served to illustrate more clearly the proper efficacy of the Gospel[p]. Twice does our Lord suggest, that this union of his people would confirm the truth of his mission[q]. And certain it is that the same effects are produced by it at this time. Where shall we look for such an union of sentiment, of affection, and of conduct, as is to be found in the Church of Christ? Hence believers are marked as a peculiar people; and the very peculiarity which pervades the Church of God, makes an impression on the hearts of thousands, who, if they could in an instant attain to the measure of peace and holiness which they see in the true believer, would willingly sacrifice all that they have in the world for it; and though, from the inveteracy of their corruptions, they are determined to go on in sin, they are constrained to acknowledge, that the Gospel of Christ is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation.]

2. The credit of the Church—

[God the Father "loveth his people, even as he loveth his only dear Son[r]." But how is it to be known that he loves them? Who can look into their hearts, and see those manifestations which he makes of himself there, as he does not unto the world? When "he sheddeth abroad his love there," who can discern it, but the persons themselves? or, as Solomon expresses it, who can "intermeddle with their joy?" But it is to be discerned by the effects it produces on their lives, just as the irradiated countenance of Moses attested the intercourse he had held with God. Accordingly, where the piety of any person is of an exalted kind, it carries with it a conviction to the minds of others; it makes religion itself appear honourable, and induces many to say, "We will go with you; for we perceive that God is with you of a truth."]

3. The welfare of the world at large—

[The world in general "hate the light, and will not come to it, lest their deeds should be reproved." But Christians, when truly exemplary, are living witnesses for God: they

[p] 1 Cor. xi. 19.

[q] Compare ver. 23. with the text.

[r] See ver. 23.

are epistles of Christ, known and read of all men; and their whole spirit and conduct is a sermon to all around them. St. Peter tells us, that many unbelieving people, who utterly despise the word of God, are "won by the good conversation" and conduct of their pious friends. On the other hand, we know that divisions or scandals in the Church are the means of casting before many a stumbling-block, over which they fall, to their eternal ruin. What can more strongly manifest the importance of union in the Church, than such considerations as these? Surely, if the welfare of *the world* so much depends upon it, we cannot wonder that our Lord offered such repeated supplications for it in our behalf; nor should there be any intermission to our exertions for the advancement of it in the Church of God.]

From this subject we may SEE,

1. The duty of the world to unite themselves to the Church—

[The Church is represented as "one fold under one Shepherd." To that fold we must be gathered: nor must we decline that open profession that shall distinguish us for his sheep. If we are ashamed of Christ and his people, Christ will be ashamed of us. We must not only "believe with our hearts unto righteousness, but make confession with our mouths unto salvation." As Judah and Israel are to become one at the latter day, like the two sticks in the prophet's hand[s], so are Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, to be all one in Christ Jesus[t]. I call on all therefore "to give themselves unto us," as St. Paul expresses it, but first to "give up their whole selves to the Lord[u]."]

2. The duty of the Church to be united among themselves—

[Who that hears our blessed Lord pleading so earnestly for this object, can doubt what his duty is in relation to it? If a doubt remain, let the Apostle Paul determine it: so desirable was this object in his eyes, that he seemed as if he could never be sufficiently urgent with his converts to cultivate it with all their hearts[x]. Let us then beg of God to "give us one heart and one way:" thus shall the sweetest fellowship be produced, not only with each other, but with the Father and with Christ; and "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son shall cleanse us from all sin[y]."]

[s] Ezek. xxxvii. 16—22. [t] Gal. iii. 28. [u] 2 Cor. viii. 5.
[x] 1 Cor. i. 10. Phil. ii. 1—4. [y] 1 John i. 3, 7.

OUTLINE NO. 1715

THE GLORY WHICH CHRIST GIVES TO HIS PEOPLE.

John xvii. 22. *The glory which thou gavest me I have given them.*

THE dignity of human nature is a favourite subject with many: nor, if man be considered in his primeval state, can it be estimated too highly. But man is a fallen creature, and reduced to the most abject condition. The Scriptures speak of him in the most humiliating terms: nevertheless, through the grace of the Gospel, he is restored to his primitive honours: he in some respects is elevated even above the angels of heaven. No words can express his dignity more fully than those of the text. Do we inquire what that glory is which the Father gave to Christ, and Christ gives to his Church and people?

We will specify it in five particulars:

I. The glory of manifesting the Divine power—

Angels have been used as instruments of Divine power both for the preservation and destruction of mankind; but it is peculiar to Christ and his people to manifest the Divine power in conflicts with their enemies.

Christ had this glory given him—

[He had innumerable enemies, both men and devils[a]; but he conquered sin, Satan, death, and hell[b]. This he did through the support and influence of his Father[c].]

This glory has Christ given us—

[His people are in a state of warfare[d]: but the very weakest of them triumph at last through Christ[e]. Paul acknowledges this to the praise of his Divine Master[f].]

II. The glory of displaying the moral perfections of the Deity—

The material world displays the *natural* perfections of God; but not even the angels in heaven can set forth all his *moral* perfections—

[a] Ps. ii. 2. Luke xxii. 53.
[b] Col. ii. 15. Eph. iv. 8.
[c] Isai. xlii. 1.
[d] Eph. vi. 12.
[e] Rom. viii. 37.
[f] 2 Cor. xii. 9.

[Never having been injured, they cannot exercise mercy, forbearance, love of enemies.]

This is the peculiar prerogative of Christ—

[Christ manifested the most wonderful compassion[g]. In so doing he displayed the Father's perfections[h]. This honour he himself received of the Father[i].]

His people however are made to share this glory with him—

[They, as stars in their several spheres, reflect the beams of the Sun of Righteousness. How strongly was his character delineated in the life of Paul and in the death of Stephen! Every one of them endeavours to "walk as he walked." They are enabled to do this by Christ himself[k].]

III. The glory of being sons of God—

The angels are sometimes called sons of God; but they bear this relation to him only as creatures.

Christ has this honour in an infinitely higher sense[l]—

[Christ is the Son of God both in his divine and human nature. He is emphatically called by the Apostle "God's dear Son[m]."]

The same honour has Christ conferred on us—

[Every believer is brought into this relation to God[n]. This astonishing mercy may well excite wonder and admiration[o]. It is bestowed on the believer by Christ himself[p].]

IV. The glory of being united to God—

The Scriptures often speak of the union that subsists between Christ and the Father—

[Our Lord himself affirmed that he and the Father were one[q]. St. Paul declares that all the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in Christ[r]. What our Lord did as man, is attributed to him as God[s].]

A similar, though not the same, union subsists between Christ and his people.

[Our Lord represents them as branches of the living vine[t]: he compares their union with him to his with the

[g] Luke xix. 41. and xxiii. 34. and xxiv. 47.
[h] John xiv. 9. [i] John xiv. 10. [k] Phil. iv. 13.
[l] Heb. i. 5. [m] Col. i. 13. [n] 2 Cor. vi. 18.
[o] 1 John iii. 1. [p] John i. 12. [q] John x. 30.
[r] Col. ii. 9. [s] Acts xx. 28. [t] John xv. 1.

Father[u]: he declares not only that he himself is the author of this union, but that it is a part of that glory which he has given us[x].]

V. The glory of reigning with God—

Both the good and evil angels are called principalities and powers, but they are never said to "reign" with God.

Our Lord however has received this honour of his Father—

[All power in heaven and in earth is committed to him[y]. He is exalted far above all principalities and powers[z]. It is decreed that every soul shall submit to Jesus[a].]

This honour also has Christ vouchsafed to his people—

[The victorious saints will exercise a kind of dominion over the ungodly at the last day[b]: they will sit with Christ as assessors in judgment over men and devils[c]: they have a kingdom appointed to them even now[d]: they will be formally invested with it at the last day: they will receive it as a special grant from Christ himself[e].]

INFER—

1. What an exalted character is the true Christian!—

[Christians are despised by the unbelieving world: but the Scriptures describe their dignity in most exalted terms. How can we ever estimate aright the glory given them by their Lord! What glory can the earth afford in comparison of this! Let us not then act unworthy of this high character.]

2. How marvellous is Christ's love to his people!—

[Every thing, which he himself has received of the Father, he gives to them: he even bought it with his blood, that he might bestow it upon them. How incomprehensible is this love! Let us entertain worthy conceptions of it: let us be constrained by it to love and serve him.]

[u] John xvii. 21. [x] ver. 22, 23. [y] Matt. xxviii. 18.
[z] Eph. i. 20, 21. [a] Isai. xlv. 23.
[b] Ps. xlix. 14. Rev. ii. 26, 27. Ps. cxlix. 7—9.
[c] 1 Cor. vi. 2, 3. [d] Luke xxii. 29. [e] Rev. iii. 21.

OUTLINE NO. 1716

CHRIST'S INTERCESSION.

John xvii. 24. *Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me.*

THERE is an height, and depth, and length, and breadth in the love of Christ, which can never be explored. His assumption of our sinful nature, and his submission to the accursed death of the cross for our sake, will fill the universe with wonder to all eternity. Next to those unparalleled instances of his love, we cannot but notice the concern which he expressed for his people's welfare in the last hours of his life. Well did he know all that was coming upon him; yet instead of being occupied, as might have been expected, about his own sufferings, he was intent only on the salvation of others. Having prayed in the hearing of his Disciples that they, and all his followers to the end of the world, might be preserved and sanctified, he adds the petition which we have now read; in discoursing on which we shall consider,

I. The subject-matter of the petition—

The manner in which it is expressed is worthy of notice.

[It is generally considered as *an authoritative demand*, which he made in consequence of the right he had in them, and with a more especial view to their comfort. Certain it is that, as his people had been "given him by the Father," and as he was now about to confirm his title to them by the surrender of his own life in their stead, he might justly claim the blessings which he asked in their behalf. But the same expression is elsewhere used where nothing more is intended than *great earnestness* in the request[a]; and this seems to be the real import of the words before us. Our Lord had come down from heaven to rescue his people from destruction; nor could he endure the thought of returning thither without first securing them to himself as the trophies of his victory. Hence was there an extraordinary emphasis laid on this petition, because, if that should not be granted, all which he had done and suffered for them would be in vain.]

[a] Mark vi. 25. and x. 35.

The *petition itself* represents the final glorification of all his Disciples—

[Jesus was now going to his Father in heaven. He was already in heaven as to his divine nature; but his human nature also was speedily to be removed thither. A short separation from them was necessary, in order that *he* might prosecute his mediatorial work in heaven, and *they* discharge their apostolic office on earth. But he had promised that, "where he was, there should also his servants be[b];" and that, as he was going to prepare mansions for them, so he would surely come again and receive them to himself, that they might be with him for ever[c]. Besides, he had already given them a glimpse of his glory, which they had seen through the veil of his flesh[d]; and had taught them to expect that what they had beheld in the dawn, should be revealed to them in its meridian splendour[e]. These expectations he would never disappoint. Hence in his intercession he gave them an additional assurance, that they should in due time possess the promised bliss. At the same time he taught them by his example, that the promises of God were not to supersede, but to encourage prayer: and that, however secure they might feel themselves in knowing the eternal purposes of God, they were never to relax their earnestness in prayer till every decree of God should be finally accomplished[f].]

As we cannot conceive any petition more important, we shall proceed to mark,

II. The blessedness of those who are interested in it—

There are two things suggested for their comfort,

1. Their security in this world—

[The saints are frequently, especially in this intercessory prayer, spoken of as "*given* to Christ by the Father." And *when* were they given him, but from all eternity[g]? Nor was it merely in his personal, but also in his official character, as the head and representative of his elect, that "the Father loved Christ from before the foundation of the world[h]." Can we suppose then that they were given to Christ, and that it was left uncertain whether he should ever enjoy the gift? Has not our Lord himself repeatedly declared, that they should never perish, and that none should ever pluck them out of his hand[i]? Further, it was for them that Jesus prayed; and "we

[b] John xii. 26. [c] John xiv 3.
[d] John i. 14. 2 Pet. i. 16, 17. [e] Matt. xix. 28.
[f] To the same effect see Jer. xxix. 11, 12. and Ezek. xxxvi. 37.
[g] Eph. i. 4. [h] Isai. xlii. 1.
[i] John x. 28, 29.

know that him the Father heareth always." For them too he is carrying on his intercession in heaven; and is not he an all-prevailing Advocate? yea, is not his intercession for them a ground of assurance, that he both can, and will, save them to the uttermost[k]? "Fear not then, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom[l]." Rejoice in your security, and know that "having loved you, our Lord will love you to the end[m];" having "bought you with a price," he will never suffer himself to be deprived of "his purchased possession."]

2. Their felicity in the world to come—

[It is the glory of Christ which irradiates heaven, and makes it what it is; "the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." Hence the Apostle speaks of "being with Christ," and "being present with the Lord," as terms equivalent with the glorification of his soul: yea, he mentions it as that which conveys the most consoling idea of heaven[n]. Now if we only consider what unspeakable joy arises from a view of Christ, through the medium of the written word, we may well conceive that an *immediate* vision of his unveiled glory constitutes the felicity of heaven. And this, believer, is thy portion: it is reserved for thee, and thou for it. Thou shalt behold him face to face[o]. Though now thou canst not endure the splendour of the meridian sun, thou shalt soon have thine organs of vision strengthened to gaze on him, who is "the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person." What felicity must this be! If the Queen of Sheba, enraptured with the glory of Solomon, exclaimed, "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants who stand before thee, and that hear thy wisdom[p]," what must be the happiness of those who behold "the Lamb upon his throne," and enjoy that beatific vision without weariness or intermission? O that we might all aspire after this honour, and that not one of us might ever come short of it!]

APPLICATION—

1. Let every one of us now inquire, Am I interested in this prayer?

[This surely is an important inquiry: it is, in fact, to ask, Shall I behold my Saviour's face with joy, or shall I behold it only at an unapproachable distance, a wretched outcast from heaven, an hopeless monument of God's displeasure? Let us enter into this inquiry with fear and trembling. But it may be asked, Is it not presumptuous to attempt an answer to such

[k] Heb. vii. 25. Luke xii. 32. [m] John xiii. 1.
[n] 1 Thess. iv. 18. [o] 1 Cor. xiii. 12. [p] 1 Kings x. 8.

an inquiry? for who can specify the persons that have been *given to Christ?* who hath looked into the book of God's decrees, that he shall undertake to answer such a question as this? We answer, that the question may easily be resolved, without presuming to pry into the secrets of God. The point may be determined by asking, *Have I given myself to Christ?* Have I as a guilty, helpless, and undone creature, given up myself to Christ, to be washed in his blood, and to be sanctified by his Spirit? Have I done this repeatedly, with deep humiliation, with fervent prayer, with faith unfeigned? If our consciences bear witness that we have indeed done this, then do we know that the Father gave us to him from all eternity; for "we love him because he first loved us[q];" and we chose him only in consequence of our having before been chosen of him[r]. Hither then let our researches be directed; nor let us ever conclude ourselves *his*, till we have shewn ourselves willing and desirous to be his.]

2. Let us all live as those who are looking for a speedy answer to it—

[How worthless would all earthly vanities appear, if we were looking daily for the glory that shall be revealed! and how effectually would death be disarmed of its sting! Methinks, we should be "looking for and hasting to the coming of that day:" we should be "desiring to depart, that we may be with Christ," and that "mortality," with all its cares or pleasures, "may be swallowed up of life." Let this be your state, brethren, and you have nothing to fear. Only maintain habitual fellowship with Christ *here*, and doubtless ye shall be with him *hereafter*. Be daily surveying his glory *now*, and you shall assuredly behold it *in the world to come*. His prayer was offered not for his immediate Disciples only, but "for all who should believe on him through their word." Be ye of this number, and all the glory of heaven shall be yours.]

[q] 1 John iv. 19. [r] John xv. 16.

OUTLINE NO. 1717

CHRIST'S ENEMIES SMITTEN DOWN BY A WORD.

John xviii. 4—9. *Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground. Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Naza-*

reth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way: that the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none.

THE cross of Christ has been an offence and a stumbling-block to both Jews and Gentiles in every age: they think it absurd to expect salvation from one who saved not himself, and life from one who was made subject unto death. But every step of his humiliation was accompanied with circumstances which abundantly attested the dignity of his person, and counterbalanced the ignominy of his low and suffering condition. When he lay in a manger, he was pointed out to the Eastern Magi by an extraordinary star; when he agonized in the garden, there came an angel from heaven to strengthen him; and when he was apprehended as a thief, he beat down the whole band of his enemies by a word of his mouth. This miraculous exertion of his power, though not recorded in the other Evangelists, is a very interesting and instructive part of our Lord's history. I wish you to notice,

I. The particular incidents here related.

1. His successful resistance to his enemies—

[Our Lord went forth boldly to meet his enemies. Many from amongst ourselves will go forth to face danger, and will manifest great boldness in the midst of it, because they hope to escape the troubles that threaten them, and to overcome the enemies that oppose them. But if they could look into futurity and see the sufferings which they would be called to endure, they would not be so precipitate; they would be glad, if possible, to avoid the evil, especially if they found that their submission to it would entail on them nothing but disgrace. Not so our blessed Lord: "he knew all things that should come upon him:" he had already tasted of the bitter cup, and knew that he was about to drink it even to the very dregs; he knew all that he should endure from men, from devils, and from his heavenly Father; yet he went forth unappalled, "enduring the cross and despising the shame."

He shewed them, however, how vain would be their attempts to apprehend him, if he chose to stand in his own defence. Inquiring calmly whom they sought, and being told, "Jesus of Nazareth," he answered, "I am he." Here were no reproaches

(for though reviled, he reviled not again), but a plain acknowledgment that he was the object whom they wanted. But with what a glorious power were his words accompanied! No sooner were they uttered, than all the band of soldiers, with Judas at their head, were struck as with lightning, and staggering backward, they fell to the ground. This miracle, though at first sight it may appear vindictive, was, in fact, as replete with mercy as any that Jesus ever wrought. It was calculated to shew them their guilt and danger, and thereby to lead them to repentance. The chief priests and elders in particular, (for they also were close at hand[a],) could scarce fail to call to mind the signal vengeance that had been inflicted on two bands of soldiers who went to apprehend Elijah, and to contrast with that the mercy they had received[b]. The recollection of this might have convinced them that they were at this instant monuments of God's forbearance, and that Christ, if he had chosen, could have struck them all dead upon the spot. Happy would it have been for them if they had indulged such obvious and suitable reflections.

But his hour being come, he satisfied himself with merely shewing them what he could do, if he pleased; and that they could no otherwise apprehend him than by,]

2. His willing surrender—

[Notwithstanding this most awful warning, they still persisted in their intention to apprehend Jesus. If the eyes be blinded and the heart hardened, it is in vain to expect any great benefit either from judgments or mercies. Like Pharaoh we may be affected for a moment, but shall soon "return with the dog to his vomit." No sooner had they recovered a little from their surprise, than they resumed their purpose. But O! who would have conceived that the ministers of religion should be so employed, and that an Apostle too should be found standing in such company, and on such an occasion? Contemplate him one moment as rising from the ground, and instantly leading on again the murderous band; what an awful picture of human depravity! Lord, what is man! What a monster of iniquity, if left to follow the dictates of his own heart.

Our Lord, having thus demonstrated his power to resist, surrendered up himself into their hands. Our Lord had before affirmed that no man could take away his life, but that he would lay it down of himself[c]. Before his hour was come he repeatedly withdrew himself both from injudicious friends and from incensed enemies[d]. But now he proceeded to fulfil his word, and willingly gave up himself into the hands of his

[a] Luke xxii. 52. [b] 2 Kings. i. 9—14.
[c] John x. 18. [d] Luke iv. 29, 30. and John vi. 15.

enemies. As, when first he undertook our cause, he said to the Father, Lo, I come, I delight to do thy will, O God[e]; so now, at the close of his undertaking, he went up to his enemies again, and asked, Whom seek ye? and replied again as before to the answer given him. Now he suffered himself to be bound as a criminal, and yielded up himself to all those indignities and miseries, which, as our surety, it became him to endure. This voluntary surrender of himself was necessary in order to his being a sacrifice for us; and it was one principal circumstance that rendered his sacrifice so peculiarly acceptable to God; "He loved us," says the Apostle, "and *gave himself* for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savour[f]."

Nevertheless, even while he thus humbled himself, he further evinced his power by,]

3. His dignified capitulation—

[He did not see fit to let his Disciples participate yet in his bitter cup. He had ordained that they should be conformed to him in their death as well as in their life. But they were yet but weak in the faith, and not able to encounter great difficulties. A premature discouragement might prove fatal to them. Our Lord therefore would "not put new wine into old bottles," or suffer his Disciples to be tried beyond their strength. On this account he stipulated with his enemies that they should not molest any of his adherents. He did not make a request to his enemies, for there was no probability that they would listen to it for one moment. He imposed it on them with authority, that they should let his Disciples go; and, by his invisible agency, he constrained them to obey him. And so effectual was his command, that they could not even retaliate upon Peter, whose temerity had exposed both himself and his fellow-disciples to most imminent hazard. Jesus had just before declared to his heavenly Father, that he had preserved all whom the Father had committed to him[g]. He was therefore peculiarly solicitous for their welfare in the hour of danger: and shewed that, though he saved not himself, he was both able and determined to save those who had put their trust in him.]

From these striking incidents we shall be led to notice,

II. The light which they cast on the general character of our Lord—

Behold him here,

1. As a surety for sinners—

[What he did on this occasion is precisely what he ha done with respect to all the enemies of our salvation. Doe

[e] Ps. xl. 7, 8. [f] Eph. v. 2. [g] John xvii. 12.

the justice of God arrest us, or his holy law condemn us? Behold, Jesus gives up himself in our stead, and says respecting us, "Let these go their way." Isaac was not more certainly doomed to death in the purpose of his father, than we were by reason of our iniquities: but Jesus, like the ram, is accepted in our stead, and we rise to a life of immortality and glory. Let us ever view Jesus in this light; — — — let us regard him as our surety and substitute; — — — nor doubt, but that through his willing sacrifice, and authoritative mediation, our souls shall live for ever.]

2. As an avenger of his enemies[h]—

[We have seen what Christ did when he was about to surrender up himself, and to stand as a criminal at man's tribunal: what then will he not do when he shall sit upon the throne of his glory, and summon the universe to *his* tribunal? If an armed band were smitten to the ground by the power of his word in the hour of his deepest humiliation, how shall an individual, unarmed, resist him in the day when he shall sit on his throne of judgment? When he shall say, "I am he," whom thou despisedst, "I am he," whose invitations thou didst slight, and on whose blood thou didst trample; what confusion will cover us! what terror will seize us! and how irresistible will be the power that shall consign us over to perdition! Surely, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." O let us seek Jesus, not to betray and dishonour him, — — — but rather to serve and glorify him with our whole hearts.]

3. As a protector of his people—

[As his people were beset with enemies at that time, so are they in every age, and every place. Malignant as they were who came to apprehend our Lord, they were but instruments in the hands of that malicious fiend who seeks to destroy us. But all the hosts of hell are as much subject to the power of Jesus, as Judas and the soldiers were. "Not any weapon formed against us can prosper," if only we put our trust in him — — — Let us then flee to him; and he will hide us under the shadow of his wings — — — As birds flying to protect their young, so will the Lord defend us. And as the attendant angel passed between the destroyer and the houses sprinkled with blood, so will the Lord pass over to preserve us from the assaults of our enemies[i]. Let us rely on him, and we shall find him a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall[k].]

[h] Isai. i. 24. [i] Isai. xxxi. 5. [k] Isai. xxv. 4.

OUTLINE NO. 1718

JESUS SMITTEN IN THE HIGH PRIEST'S PALACE.

John xviii. 19—23. *The high-priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine. Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said. And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high-priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?*

THE Holy Scriptures are generally considered as containing only matter of historic record; whereas in reality, with the difference only of some outward circumstances, they exhibit a faithful picture of all that is passing at this present day, in ourselves, and in the world around us. Religion is the same now as it always was; and human nature is still the same; and consequently the operations of religion also are the same, whether in those who hate, or those who embrace, it. In the history before us, we must, doubtless, primarily regard our blessed Lord as suffering what God in his determinate counsels had ordained him to suffer for the sins of men: but, if we would reap the full benefit from these occurrences, we must view them in their general aspect, as shewing us,

I. How religion is opposed—

Few will admit at all that religion is opposed in the present day: but daily experience proves that it is still, precisely as in former ages, opposed,

1. With inveterate prejudice—

[The interrogations put to Jesus by the high-priest had the appearance of candour (for the bitterest enemies of Christianity wish to maintain somewhat of the semblance of justice); but they proceeded from nothing but a desire to elicit something from Jesus which should serve as a ground of accusation against him. This was clearly perceived by our blessed Lord; and therefore, instead of suffering himself to be thus ensnared

by his blood-thirsty persecutor, he referred him to the very people who were seeking his destruction, that he might learn from them the crimes which they had to lay to his charge. Had the high-priest been sincerely desirous of knowing, from Jesus himself, what his doctrines were, and what he expected of his Disciples, that he might guard the more effectually against any misrepresentations or mistakes, and administer justice with impartiality, our Lord would not have withheld from him the necessary information. But the high-priest had no such objects in view: his design was only to find an occasion against Jesus, either on account of something which should proceed out of his mouth, or as concealing truths which he dared not to avow.

And do we not here see the spirit in which inquiries are still made at this very hour, in relation both to the doctrines of the Gospel, and to the people who profess it? In what a captious way are questions continually put to religious characters, by those who hate the doctrines of the Gospel! The object of the inquirers is, not to gain such a knowledge as shall convince and satisfy their minds, but to draw forth some answer, which shall either really, or in appearance at least, justify their rejection of all true religion. So also in relation to the followers of Christ; their enemies have no wish to hear any thing in their favour: all that they want, is, to collect anecdotes to the disadvantage of those who profess godliness, and to find reasons for holding them up to derision and reproach. The very same spirit which urged on the enemies of Daniel[a], wrought also in the enemies of Jesus[b], and still reigns, though often cloked under the most specious garb, in all who embrace not the Gospel of Christ[c].]

2. With licentious violence—

[Nothing could be more honourable than our Lord's appeal to those who surrounded him; since they had all heard his discourses continually in the temple, and were thoroughly disposed to bring their accusations against him, if they were able to lay any thing to his charge. Yet behold, this appeal, instead of being received as a declaration of his innocence, was resented as an indignity offered to the high-priest; and *that* too in a way which was contrary to all law, or equity, or common humanity: in a court of justice itself, an officer of that court, in the very presence of the judge, struck the prisoner, not only uncondemned, but unheard; yea, and before even an accusation had been brought against him! In what court under heaven would such injustice be tolerated in a common cause? Yet was this passed over without any testimony

[a] Dan. vi. 4, 5. [b] Luke xi. 54. [c] 2 Cor. xi. 12.

of disapprobation, either from the judge, or from any of his attendants!

And do we not here see how the rights of God's people are trampled on by all who choose to persecute and oppress them? Yes verily, the most injurious treatment may be shewn to them, and none will stand up to vindicate their cause. They are neither judged, nor protected by the same laws as other men. Against a godly man acting for his Lord and Saviour, any one may rise, and may insult and injure him, not only with impunity, but with the approbation of many; whilst, if the very same line of conduct were pursued by a professor of godliness against a man of this world, a fire would be kindled in every breast, and a general indignation excited against the offending person. We cannot descend to particulars; but the observation of every man may furnish them in abundance: and, if any one be acquainted with instances of such licentious violence, we desire him only to look at the means which are used to cramp the efforts of the godly, and to arrest the progress of vital godliness; and then to ask himself, What he would think of religious persons, if they were to adopt such measures against the opposers of the Gospel as the opposers of the Gospel adopt towards them? And we will venture to say, that a very few minutes' consideration shall convince him, that "those who are born after the flesh do still persecute those who are born after the Spirit," and that the descendants of Cain, of Ishmael, and of Doeg, are not by any means extinct.]

3. With hypocritical pretences—

[This officer professed a high regard for order and decorum; but a greater act of indecorum can scarcely be conceived than that which he himself committed at that very time; since the taking for granted that the judge who sat there, to administer justice, would suffer all the rights of justice to be so violated in his very presence, was as severe a reflection upon the judge as could well be cast on a human being. Yet this was the man who complained of a want of order and decorum in our blessed Lord, and made that a plea for the outrage which he himself committed. What hypocrisy was here! yet it is no other than what is practised every day by those who hate the Gospel, and labour to obstruct its progress. Need we go to Rome to hear the plea, that, from the labours of Christ's faithful servants, the Church is in danger? With what sanctimonious zeal will many cry out against lectures on a Sabbath evening, as injurious to morality; whilst they never lift up a voice against the theatres, in which so much iniquity abounds! And what concern will many express about the peace of men's minds as disturbed by the Gospel, when they have never, on any

occasion whatever, shewn any regard for the spiritual interests of others, or even for the welfare of their own souls! I mean not to say, that the welfare of the Church, and the interests of morality, and the peace of men's minds, ought to be deemed of small importance; for they ought, beyond a doubt, to be regarded with the utmost care and tenderness: but this I say, that they are not uncommonly made a pretext for opposing religion, by persons who on any other occasion would shew no regard for them at all. Rather than not prevail to destroy the Lord Jesus, the Jews would cry out, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend:" when they would not have hesitated to throw off Cæsar's yoke at any moment, if they could have attempted it with any prospect of success[d]. Their loyalty was but a pretext; their only object being to ensure the condemnation of one, whose innocence the very judge himself had repeatedly proclaimed. The truth is, that the godly are a prey, which every man is at liberty to hunt down; and in the taking of which he is at liberty to use any means which his ingenuity may devise[e].]

But whilst in the conduct of the Jews we see how religion is opposed, we see, in the conduct of our Lord,

II. How it is to be maintained—

None of the weapons which are made use of by the enemies of religion, are to be employed by its friends. If they contend with evil, we are to contend with good, and to "overcome evil with good." The cause of Christ must be maintained,

1. With undaunted firmness—

[Our blessed Lord was not intimidated by this rude assault; but, as one who felt that he was possessed of a good conscience, and a good cause, he firmly expostulated with his adversary: "If I have done evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?" Now this shews us, that we are not called to submit to injuries without maintaining that we have still the same rights as other men, and that, when those rights are violated, we have just reason to complain. St. Paul, when a Roman Centurion had bound him with thongs, and was about to scourge him, asserted his right, as a Roman citizen, to be regarded as innocent, till his guilt had been proved in a court of justice[f]: and at another time, after having been unjustly beaten and imprisoned, he would not leave the prison till the magistrates, who had so treated him, should "come to fetch him out[g]." Thus we may avoid injuries

[d] John xix. 12. [e] Isai. lix. 15.
[f] Acts xxii. 25. [g] Acts xvi. 37.

when no sacrifice of conscience is required: but, rather than violate, in any instance, our duty to God, we must brave all the injuries that can be inflicted on us. The Hebrew Youths have set us an excellent example in this respect. When menaced with being cast into the fiery furnace, they expressed their confidence in God, that he would interpose for their deliverance: but whether such an interposition should be vouchsafed or not, they were determined to hold fast their integrity at all events: "Our God will deliver us. But, if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods[h]." No trials whatever should at any time drive us from this point. Whatever persecutions may arise, we must say with Paul, "None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself." In a word, we must "not fear man, who can only kill the body; but fear Him alone, who can destroy both body and soul in hell[i]."]

2. With unruffled patience—

[Though our Lord's answer was firm, there was not the smallest degree of irritation in it. And herein he shewed how superior he was to any mortal man. Moses was the meekest man upon the face of the earth; yet, when greatly tried, he broke forth into unadvised expressions, which brought the displeasure of God upon him[k]. And when Paul was injured precisely in the same way that Jesus was, he resentfully addressed the judge that had so injured him: "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law[l]?" Our duty in all circumstances is to imitate "the meekness and gentleness of Christ," who, as St. Peter informs us, "suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps: who, being reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously[m]." If we betray any unhallowed temper, our adversaries have so far gained a victory over us. We must, under all circumstances, "possess our souls in patience;" and "let patience have its perfect work, that we may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing."]

From the whole then we may LEARN,

1. What to expect—

["The servant must not expect to be above his lord." "If men called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household." Our blessed Lord strongly guards us upon this very point: "Marvel not," says he, "if the world hate you: if it hate you, ye know that it hated me

[h] Dan. iii. 18. [i] Luke xii. 4, 5. [k] Numb. xx. 10—12.
[l] Acts xxiii. 2, 3. [m] 1 Pet. ii. 21—23.

before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you[n]." Nor is it mere hatred that we must expect to encounter, but injuries also, yes, and injuries of the most atrocious kind. "If we will live godly in Christ Jesus, we shall assuredly suffer persecution." Let us then "count the cost;" and be ready to pay it. "The pearl of great price" is worth it all.]

2. How to act—

[Let us set our Lord Jesus Christ before us as our example. "He, when oppressed and afflicted, opened not his mouth: he was brought as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth[o]." O blessed attainment! how rare! how beautiful! "To turn the left cheek to him who smites us on the right! to let a man who sues us at the law, and takes away our coat, take away with him our cloak also! and when compelled to go with a man one mile, to accompany him voluntarily another[p]!" What hard sayings are these to the carnal man! and how difficult to be carried into execution, even by the most spiritual! But, beloved, let us not despair of attaining these things; for "the grace of Christ is sufficient for us;" and we may rest assured, that, if only we "be strong in him," we shall "be able to do all things through Christ who strengtheneth us." And it is but a little time that we shall be called to these sacrifices. Soon we shall be beyond the reach of all our adversaries: having "suffered with Christ, and overcome through him, we shall soon be glorified together, and sit down with him upon his throne, as he overcame, and is set down with his Father upon his throne[q]."]

[n] John xv. 18—20. [o] Isai. liii. 6.
[p] Matt. v. 39—41. [q] Rom. viii. 17. Rev. iii. 21.

OUTLINE NO. 1719

CHRIST'S GOOD CONFESSION.

John xviii. 37. *Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.*

IN the whole of our Saviour's life there was a strong apparent contradiction between the character

he professed, and that which he visibly sustained. At his introduction into the world he was announced as a most exalted personage, even as "the King of the Jews[a];" yet was he found born in a stable, and laid in a manger. When he entered triumphantly into Jerusalem, and was welcomed with loud hosannas as the Son of David, he did not assume the pomp of earthly monarchs, but rode thither, in a meek and lowly manner, seated on a young ass[b]. But this opposition between his mean appearance and his high pretensions never was more visible than when he stood before the bar of Pilate. He was like any other poor man; except indeed that he was bound as a criminal, and held by his whole nation as more execrable than even a robber or a murderer: yet at this time did he assert his claim to kingly authority, or, as St. Paul expresses it, "witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate[c]."

In his answer to Pilate, there are two things to be considered;

I. His confession—

The Jews had already condemned him, for making himself the Son of God[d]. But he could not be executed, unless Pilate also should condemn him. But Pilate did not regard any questions relating to the Jewish law; and therefore the Jews brought a different charge against him before Pilate; affirming that he had set up himself as a King against Cæsar. On this charge Pilate questioned him, and received the answer which we have just read.

In this answer we notice,

1. The boldness of it—

[Our Lord had already told Pilate, that he disclaimed any idea of establishing an earthly kingdom; and that there was no ground for fear or jealousy, as if he was invading the rights of Cæsar, or attempting to rescue his country from the Roman yoke. He appealed to the prohibition which he had just before given to his Disciples respecting their using the sword in his

[a] Luke ii. 11, 12. [b] Zech. ix. 9. with Matt. xxi. 2—9.
[c] 1 Tim. vi. 13. [d] Matt. xxvi. 63—65.

defence; and declared, that the kingdom to which he aspired was not of a worldly nature; not established on worldly principles, nor supported by worldly force, nor governed by worldly policy, nor in any respect interfering with the interests of other monarchs. Yet even in thus rectifying the misapprehensions of Pilate, he *thrice* used the words, "My kingdom." He might have satisfied himself with simply denying his interference with human governments: but he would on no account conceal what it was of importance to the world to know: and therefore, though he foresaw all the consequences of his confession, he answered plainly to the next interrogation, "Thou sayest truly; I am a King."]

2. The truth of it—

[The prophets had abundantly testified of the regal dignity of the Messiah[e] — — — and in the New Testament it had been confirmed by the testimony both of men and angels[f]. The very works also which he had wrought, bore witness to him[g]. The difference which subsisted between his government and earthly kingdoms, so far from invalidating his claim, served only to establish it on the firmest basis: for, whereas other kings had dominion only over the bodies of men, he reigned over their souls: others had their territories bounded by seas or mountains; but his extended over all the earth.]

But we shall have a further insight into the truth of his confession, while we consider,

II. His explanation of it—

The connexion between the two parts of our Lord's answer is not obvious at first sight: but, on comparing them with attention, we shall find, that in the latter he explains,

1. The manner in which he exercises his kingly office—

[Satan is "the god of this world," "the prince that ruleth in all the children of disobedience[h]." He has usurped a power over the whole race of mankind, and he governs them all as his vassals[i].

Now Jesus has not, like other kings, any persons who are his subjects *by birth:* every one of his subjects is rescued from under the dominion of Satan, and constrained to submit to him.

[e] Isai. ix. 6, 7. Dan. ii. 44. and vii. 13, 14. and ix. 25. and Ps. lxxii. 1, 11.
[f] Matt. ii. 2. Luke i. 32, 33.
[g] John x. 25.
[h] 2 Cor. iv. 4. Eph. ii. 2.
[i] 2 Tim. ii. 26.

But with what weapons does our blessed Lord invade the kingdom of Satan? not with those which are used in earthly wars, but with the force of truth. It is by darkness and falsehood that Satan retains men in his service; and it is by the light of truth that Christ delivers them from their bondage. Satan makes men believe that "God is even such an one as themselves;" that they have no reason to fear his displeasure; that their own good works or repentance will save them; and that it is sufficient for them to maintain a moral and decent conduct. Our blessed Lord, on the contrary, proclaims that God is a just and holy Being; that sinners are obnoxious to his wrath; that there is no reconciliation with God but through him; and that they who would be happy in the next world, must now devote themselves wholly to the service of their God. It had been foretold that He should be "a witness to the people[k]:" and he came agreeably to the prediction, "to bear witness to the truth." "For this very end was he born;" and by executing this office, he prevailed, and still does prevail, on thousands to renounce their allegiance to Satan, and to "take upon them his light and easy yoke."]

2. The distinguishing character of his subjects—

[Those are said to be "of the truth," who have been begotten, or converted, by it: just as those are said to be "of God," who have been born of God[l]. Now every one that has experienced the influence of truth in "bringing him out of darkness into light," and "in translating him from the power of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son[m]," from that time "hears the voice of Christ," and obeys it without reserve. "Other lords had dominion over him before:" the world governed him by its maxims; the flesh captivated him by its allurements; the devil enslaved him by his temptations: but from henceforth he will not listen to the syren voice of pleasure, or regard the calls of interest or reputation: he has sworn allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ; and for him he is determined to sacrifice every other consideration.

This designates the character of Christ's subjects. Wherever such persons are found, these are the subjects of his kingdom. Other kings exercise their sway over those only who are born in a particular country: but in whatever country these persons live, they belong to Christ; to Christ supremely, to Christ only. All other authorities are subservient to his; and are to be obeyed so far only as shall be agreeable to his laws, and conducive to his honour.

At the same time, none are his subjects, who do not cor-

[k] Isai. lv. 4. [l] Compare Jam. i. 18. with 1 John iii. 19.
[m] 1 Pet. ii. 9. Col. i. 13.

respond with the character here given. Whatever they may profess, they are not his: they may call themselves Christians; but he calls them traitors, rebels, enemies.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who never yet submitted to Christ's government—

[Whose are *ye?* There are but two monarchs, who divide the whole world between them; and these are, Christ and Satan. If then you have never been smitten with that "two-edged sword, the word of truth;" if you have never been so deeply wounded, that nothing but the "balm of Gilead" could heal you; if you have never cast down the arms of your rebellion, and surrendered up yourselves to Christ, we must say of you, as Christ himself did of the Jews, "Ye are of your father the devil[n]." And if you are Satan's vassals, from whom, and with whom, must you expect your reward? Let this question come home to your hearts; and choose ye this day "whose ye will be, and whom ye will serve[o]."]

2. Those who are afraid to yield themselves up to Christ—

[Alas! that any should be deterred by fear or shame from acknowledging Christ; when he braved even the most cruel death, rather than deny the office which he bore for us! What can be your loss or pain, when compared with his? What is the contempt poured upon you, when compared with the accursed death of the cross to which he submitted for your sakes? Perhaps you expect to be acknowledged as his subjects, though you shun the odium of acknowledging him as your king. But this cannot be; for those who deny him shall be denied by him; and those only who confess him, shall be confessed by him in the presence of his Father, and of his holy angels[p].]

3. Those who call themselves his subjects—

[What our heavenly King said of himself, may be fitly applied to all his subjects; "For this end were ye born, and for this cause came ye into the world, that ye should bear witness unto the truth." Ye are to be God's witnesses in the world: "ye are to be as lights," and "as a city set on a hill." Let it appear then that "the truth has made you free[q]." Let it be seen in you, that truth will rectify, not only the errors of the mind, but the propensities of the heart; and that, when it is "mighty through God, it will bring every thought and desire into captivity to the obedience of Christ[r]."]

[n] John viii. 44. [o] Josh. xxiv. 14. [p] Matt. x. 32, 33.
[q] John viii. 32. [r] 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

OUTLINE NO. 1720

PILATE'S INQUIRY ABOUT TRUTH.

John xviii. 38. *Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?*

THE rich and powerful are for the most part under great disadvantages for the attainment of religious knowledge. Their appointed teachers too often "prophesy smooth things to them;" and those who would deal faithfully with their consciences, are kept at a distance from them. Their dispositions and habits also are generally unfavourable for the reception of truth: and hence it is, that if they have an opportunity of gaining instruction, they rarely avail themselves of it, so as to derive any essential benefit to their souls[a]. Herod heard John the Baptist; but "knew not how to use the price put into his hand." Festus, and Agrippa, and Felix were variously affected with the preaching of Paul, but no one of them was savingly converted unto God. Pilate, as governor of Judæa, had Christ himself brought before him, for the express purpose of inquiring into his pretensions to the kingdom of Israel: and when our Lord had informed him what kind of a kingdom it was that he claimed, and that he came into the world to bear witness to the truth, Pilate asked him, "What is truth?" Happy man, who made such an inquiry; and who had One before him so capable of giving him instruction respecting it! Surely this man could not fail of being saved. But, alas! he waited not for an answer. We do not apprehend that he put the question contemptuously, as though he had said, "Why do you talk to me about *truth?*" The notice which the Evangelist takes of his question, gives us reason to think that it was intended seriously; though the event shewed, that he was not sufficiently anxious to obtain the information which he had professed to desire. However, the question was important; and, had his mind been duly impressed with its importance, we should have had to number him among the

[a] 1 Cor. i. 26.

followers, rather than the enemies, of that despised Nazarene.

For our present improvement, we shall endeavour to state,

I. The importance of the inquiry—

Truth is of various kinds, physical, moral, and religious. By physical truth, we mean that which comprehends all the phenomena of nature: and by moral truth, that which relates to the whole system of morals, independent of religion. That an inquiry into these is important, appears from its having been the employment of all wise men from the beginning of the world; and from the value that has been set even on the smallest measures of truth which have, by means of the most patient and laborious investigations, been at any time brought to light. But religious truth, and that especially of which our Lord came to testify, is, beyond all comparison, more important than any other. What that truth is, we will state in few words. The point upon which our blessed Lord was examined before the Jewish council, was, "Art thou the Christ?" and that before Pilate, was, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" To both of these he answered in the affirmative, "I am." Now these two points comprise all that truth, respecting which our blessed Lord came to testify: first, *He is the anointed Saviour of the world;* and, secondly, *He is the King and Governor of all whom he saves. This* is truth: *this* is the sum and substance of the Gospel[b]: there is nothing connected with the justification, the sanctification, or the complete and everlasting salvation of mankind, which is not comprehended in *this*. Consequently, an inquiry into *this* must be of the very first importance.

It is important,

1. For the forming of our principles—

[Man without a principle is like a ship without a rudder, driven by every wave of temptation, and every gust of passion.

[b] Compare Acts ii. 36. where these two points, that "Jesus is both *Lord* and *Christ*," are spoken of precisely in this view.

He has nothing whereby to judge of good and evil in matters of the greatest moment; no standard, to which he can refer a doubtful opinion; no touchstone, by which he can try a specious sentiment.

But whither can a man go for the forming of his principles? If he apply to heathen philosophers, he finds nothing fixed, nothing certain, nothing wherein they are generally agreed. Even the question, "What is the chief good of man?" he finds unsettled; and can obtain no clew that can lead him to any definite judgment.

But in the Gospel, all his doubts are solved. There he sees, that love to Christ as his Saviour, and obedience to him as his King, are to be the main-spring, which must set every wheel in motion. Whatever accords with the principle of love to him, and with the rule of his revealed will, is good; and whatever deviates from the one or other, even if it be only an hair's breadth, is wrong. To this standard every feeling of the heart, and every expression of it in act, may be referred; and, *if rightly referred*, its true nature and quality will be infallibly determined.]

2. For the regulating of our conduct—

[As the principles of the greatest philosophers were involved in doubt and uncertainty, so were they altogether destitute of any sanctifying influence: they wrought no change on the morals of men; they produced no consistent change even on their own morals. Even Christianity itself, *if there be not a direct and constant reference in the mind to that particular truth spoken of in the text*, will not prevail to the renovating of the soul. Of this we have decisive evidence in the lives of nominal Christians; who, though they have a higher standard of morals than the heathen, are strangers to that heavenliness of mind, which characterizes a real saint.

But the knowledge of this truth will bring, not the actions only, but even "the thoughts, into captivity to the obedience of Christ." The truth, cordially embraced, will operate as fire on metal, pervading the whole soul, and transforming it, as it were, into its own image[c].]

3. For the saving of the soul—

[Whatever God may do in a way of uncovenanted mercy, (respecting which, as there is nothing revealed, it were presumptuous to speak;) men ignorant of the Gospel are invariably represented as in a state of guilt and condemnation. "If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are *lost*." Indeed, the very circumstance of "Christ's coming into the world on

[c] See the want and the attainment of it contrasted. Eph. iv 17—24.

purpose to bear witness to the truth," and his submitting to the accursed death of the cross in confirmation of that truth, is proof sufficient, that the knowledge of the truth is essential to our happiness, and that every living creature is bound to inquire into it.]

The objects and reasons of our inquiry being thus defined, we proceed to notice,

II. The manner in which it should be made—

Here Pilate was greatly defective: and, in marking his defects, we are unavoidably led to notice the manner in which such an inquiry should be made: it should be made,

1. With seriousness—

[Some will inquire about religion with as much levity as if it were quite a trifling concern: they have nothing in view but the gratifying of their curiosity. They resemble the Jews who came to converse with Paul when he was a prisoner at Rome; "We desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest[d]:" or those who ridiculed the doctrine of the resurrection; "We will hear thee again of this matter[e]:" or those foolish women, of whom we read, that they were "ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth[f]." But religion is a serious matter; and in our inquiries respecting it we should remember, that on our acceptance or rejection of the truth our everlasting welfare depends — — —]

2. With candour—

[While some are light and trifling, others make inquiries only that they may carp and cavil at the word. Such were the Herodians, the Sadducees, and Pharisees of old, who brought forth their respective difficulties, merely to ensnare Jesus, and entangle him in his talk[g]: and such were those also, who "urged him vehemently to speak of many things, that they might find something whereof to accuse him[h]." But we should rather imitate the Beræans, who, instead of determining at once that all which they heard from time to time was folly and delusion, "searched the Scriptures daily, to find whether things were as they had been represented to them" — — —]

3. With humility—

[There are many things revealed to us in the Gospel which are contrary to the generally prevailing opinions of

[d] Acts xxviii. 22. [e] Acts xvii. 32. [f] 2 Tim. iii. 7.
[g] Matt. xxii. 15—17, 23—28, 34—36. [h] Luke xi. 53, 54.

mankind: "they are even foolishness unto the natural man; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." In order to understand them aright, we must receive them simply on the authority of God; and conclude them to be true, because he has revealed them. We must beg of him "the gift of his Holy Spirit, that we may know the things which are freely given to us of God:" for then only shall we know him, when "he gives us an understanding to know him," and reveals his dear Son in our hearts as the hope of glory. If we are so wise that we will not seek instruction from him, God will "take us in our own craftiness" — — —]

4. With diligence—

[It is not a transient or superficial inquiry that will suffice: we must "search for wisdom, and dig for her as for hid treasures." We must not presently give over the pursuit, because we find that we have not yet attained: the promise is, "Then shall ye know, if *ye follow on* to know the Lord." There are in the Gospel heights and depths which cannot be explored: and therefore, however deep our acquaintance may be with this stupendous mystery, we should still "not count ourselves to have attained," but continue to "give attendance to reading," and to pray with unabated fervour, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law!" — — —]

5. With a determination to embrace whatever we may find to be agreeable to the mind and will of God—

[This is the main point: "If we will do God's will, we shall know of the doctrine whether it be of him." If we will not receive the truth in the love of it, God will give us over to believe a lie, in order to our more aggravated condemnation[i]. To receive it speculatively will be to no purpose: for it were better to be wholly ignorant of it, than to "hold it in unrighteousness," or turn from it after having once professed to embrace it[k] — — —]

ADDRESS—

[As Pilate asked of Jesus, "What is truth?" so you are come hither professedly to make the same inquiry. Behold then, in Christ's stead we answer your inquiry: *This* is truth; that Jesus is the Christ; and that his people look unto him as the Saviour of the world. *This* is truth; that Jesus is also the King of Israel; and that all who are his, submit to his government — — — Now go not away, as Pilate did, regard-

[i] 2 Thess. ii. 10—12.
[k] Rom. i. 18. Heb. vi. 4—6. 2 Pet. ii. 21.

less of your own question; but reflect upon it; consider its importance; meditate on the answer given to it; and examine your own hearts, how far you understand it — — — how far you feel it — — — and how far your lives are conformed to it — — — "If you know the truth, it will make you free:" but if it do not "sanctify you" in this world, it can never profit you in the world to come."]

OUTLINE NO. 1721

PILATE'S FURTHER ATTEMPT TO SAVE JESUS.

John xix. 5. *Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!*

IT is common to speak of our fallen nature as *altogether* corrupt, and destitute of *any* good thing. But this must be understood with caution: for though it is true that there is nothing *really* and *spiritually* good in the natural man, (as Paul says, "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing,") yet there is a principle of conscience, which, in proportion as it is enlightened, deters men from evil, and prompts them to what is good. Of this we have many examples in the Holy Scriptures; and a very striking one in the passage before us. Pilate was persuaded in his mind that Jesus was innocent, and therefore could not endure the thought of putting him to death. He strove by every means in his power to pacify those who sought his life: a great many different times he bore witness to his innocence; and, when that would not succeed, he laboured in a variety of ways to release him. He offered to inflict upon him the punishment of scourging, under the idea that his enemies would be satisfied with that: and now, after having inflicted that punishment, and permitted him to be treated with every species of indignity, he had recourse to one more device, in hopes that he should at last prevail upon them to spare him. He brought forth Jesus, arrayed as he was in mock majesty, and his face defiled with blood and spitting; and said unto the people, "Behold the man!"

This may be viewed,

I. As a political expedient—

Pilate, not daring absolutely to refuse the demands of the Jews, yet still bent on effecting the release of Jesus, had recourse to this,

1. To excite their pity—

[He well knew that the most savage heart, however insensible to the cries of misery when heard only at a distance, is apt to relent, when the suffering object is presented before the eyes. He therefore set Jesus before them in this state; hoping thereby, that they would be moved with compassion at the sight of his unmerited distresses. Pilate's address to them was probably to this effect: "Behold the man whose crucifixion you have demanded: I have already repeatedly told you that I could find in him nothing worthy of death: but, as I take for granted that you have some cause for your complaints, I have examined him by scourging; yet I am still constrained to renew my testimony, that I can find in him no fault at all. Supposing however that he has in some respect offended against your law, I can assure you he has already suffered severely for it; and therefore I hope you will be satisfied, without urging me to proceed any further against him. Look, and see what a pitiable object he is: and let your anger give way to the nobler sentiments of pity and compassion."

Well might Pilate adopt this expedient, because Christ himself is represented as pleading in this very manner with his relentless persecutors[a], though, alas! without attaining the object of his desires[b].]

2. To shame their enmity—

[The nation had accused Jesus of stirring up rebellion in the land. Now Pilate hoped, that a sight of him in his present deplorable state would convince them, that there was nothing to fear from him on this head: for the meekness with which he had borne all his sufferings shewed clearly, that he was not of a turbulent disposition; and the circumstance of his not having a single friend or partisan to speak for him, proved, that, whatever his inclination might be, he had not the power to do harm. "Look at him," we may suppose Pilate to say: "see what a contemptible appearance he makes! Is this a man of whom the whole nation has cause to be afraid? Is this a man of whose power and influence you need to be so jealous, that you cannot rest till he is put to death? Supposing that he has

[a] Lam. i. 12. [b] Ps. lxix. 20.

had some influence, what will he have in future? Only let him alone, and in a little time it will scarce be known that such a poor despised creature exists."

Such were the arguments with which David had repeatedly appeased the murderous wrath of Saul[c]. And Pilate might reasonably hope that they would have weight, especially when addressed to them by the judge and governor, whose exclusive duty it was to watch over the interests of the state. But, alas! the chief priests and scribes, who had acted covertly before, now took the lead in clamour and tumult, and bore down all before them. Nothing but the crucifixion of Jesus would satisfy them; and they gave Pilate to understand, that, if he did not comply with their wishes in this respect, they would denounce him as an enemy to Cæsar, and a traitor to his own country[d].]

There is yet another view in which we may regard the words of Pilate; namely,

II. As a prophetic intimation—

It is well known that Caiaphas, when intending nothing himself but to recommend the execution of Jesus as necessary for the good of the state, unwittingly uttered a prophecy respecting the saving benefits of his death, and *that* not to the Jews only, but to all the world[e]. Now the words of Pilate bear much more of a prophetic aspect than those of Caiaphas, since they accord with many acknowledged prophecies, not in spirit merely, but almost in the express terms[f]. Moreover, Pilate's wife had had somewhat of a revelation respecting Jesus that very morning, and had sent word of it to Pilate, whilst he was yet upon the seat of judgment[g]: and he himself had invariably, and with great constancy, borne testimony to the innocency of Jesus: so that his words on this occasion might well bear that kind of construction which God himself has taught us to put upon the words of Caiaphas. But, as the Scripture *affirms* nothing respecting this, so neither do *we:* we may however, with great propriety, put these words into

[c] 1 Sam. xxiv. 14. and xxvi. 20. [d] ver. 6, 12.
[e] John xi. 49—52.
[f] Isai. xl. 9. and xlv. 22. and lxv. 1. and Zech. xii. 10.
[g] Matt. xxvii. 19.

the mouth of a Christian preacher, and take occasion from them to lead you to the

CONTEMPLATION of your suffering Lord. I say then, "Behold the man!" Behold him,

1. To engage your confidence—

[To a superficial inquirer, all these humiliating circumstances would appear to justify a doubt whether Jesus were the Son of God. But to one who examines thoroughly the prophecies relating to him, these very circumstances afford the most satisfactory proof that he was indeed the Christ. Was he treated with the utmost contempt, and that too by the whole nation? Was he mocked, reviled, spit upon? Was he beaten with scourges, so that his flesh was even ploughed up with stripes? Then I see that he was the Christ; for not only the ancient prophets, but he himself expressly told us that it should be so[h]. Did he endure all these things without one word of murmur or complaint? Then I am sure that he was the Christ[i].

But it is not in this view only that his sufferings afford us grounds of confidence. Whilst they prove him to be the true Messiah, they prove also, beyond a possibility of doubt, his willingness to save *all* who come unto him. In enduring all these things, he submitted willingly. He could, if he had chosen, have had more than twelve legions of angels for his defence: but then the Scriptures would not have been fulfilled, nor would the work of our salvation have been accomplished. If then he willingly submitted to these indignities for us when we were enemies, what will he not do for us when we throw down the weapons of our rebellion, and implore his mercy? Surely no person, whatever he may have been or done, shall ever apply to him in vain — — —]

2. To inflame your gratitude—

[It is well said by the Apostle, that "the love of Christ passeth knowledge." It is not possible for any finite mind to comprehend it. Something of it indeed "every saint may comprehend[k];" but its full extent can never be explored. That however which we do see of it, should operate with irresistible energy upon our minds. Brethren, "behold the man!" See the royal robe, which they have put upon him; the cane in his hand, for a sceptre; the crown of thorns upon his head; and the blood issuing from his lacerated temples: see him ready to faint through the severities inflicted on him; and

[h] Compare Isai. xlix. 7. and l. 6. and liii. 3—5. and Ps. cxxix. 3. with Mark x. 32—34.

[i] Isai. liii. 7. with 1 Pet. ii. 33. [k] Eph. iii. 18, 19.

then say, These are the fruits of his love to me; these things he endures, to rescue me from "everlasting shame and contempt." Then ask yourselves, What returns he merits at your hands? Surely to compliment him with the name of Saviour, will not be thought sufficient: there must be a tribute, not of the lip only, but of the heart; in the heart a flame of love should be kindled, which, like the fire upon the altar, should never go out — — —]

3. To stimulate your exertions—

[There is no one so blind as not to see that our acknowledgments to Christ should shew themselves, not in sentiment only, but in action. Indeed he himself tells us, that it is by obedience to his commands we are to prove our love to him[1]. What then shall we do, to evince our love to him? What? Let us follow the example of his love to us. When the people sought him to make him really a king, he refused their services, and hid himself from them: but when they arrayed him in mock majesty, and put a crown of thorns upon his head, he submitted willingly to that, because it would conduce to our benefit. Thus let us be regardless of all personal gratifications, that we may exalt and honour him: and if we are called to suffer for his sake, let us suffer willingly and meekly. As "he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself," "sustaining the cross and despising the shame" for us, let us "follow him, bearing his reproach." If we be made "a gazing-stock" and "a spectacle to the world," let us be content to be loaded with every species of ignominy for his sake. Let us remember, that "he gave himself for us, to purchase unto himself a peculiar people *zealous of good works;*" and let it be our fixed determination to answer in this respect the end of his sufferings; and, provided "he be magnified in our body," let it be a matter of indifference to us "whether it be by life or by death."]

[1] John xiv. 15, 21. and xv. 14.

OUTLINE NO. 1722

THE SUPERSCRIPTION AFFIXED TO THE CROSS.

John xix. 19—22. *And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was,* JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. *This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.*

NOTHING was left undone which could add to the sufferings of our blessed Lord. From the tribunal at which he was condemned, he was hurried away to execution, and crucified between two most notorious malefactors, as being himself the vilest of the human race. This however served only to fulfil the Scripture, which had said, "He was numbered with the transgressors." On such occasions it was common to place above the head of the criminal an inscription, by which all the spectators might know both his name and the crime for which he suffered. This was observed at the crucifixion of our Lord: and (as no circumstance respecting him is uninteresting) we shall call your attention to,

I. The superscription put over him—

This, however intended at first, must certainly be considered by us in a two-fold view;

1. As an accusation against him—

[The principal charge which had been exhibited against him before Pilate, was, that he had professed himself to be "Christ, a King[a]." On this point he had been interrogated by Pilate; and had "witnessed a good confession," acknowledging plainly, that he was a King, though his kingdom was not of this world[b]. Pilate, seeing that this claim did not at all interfere with the temporal government of Cæsar, considered it as unworthy his attention; and therefore sought by all possible means to release him. But the chief priests, being determined to prevail, represented this claim of his as an avowed hostility to Cæsar; and declared that the protecting of Jesus was nothing less than treason[c]. This terrified Pilate into a compliance with their wishes. He instantly consented to his death; and, according to custom, ordered the crime of which Jesus was accused to be affixed to his cross, in these memorable words, "JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS."]

2. As a testimony in his favour—

[As Caiaphas, when designing only to destroy Jesus, unconsciously declared the extensive benefits which would flow from his death, so Pilate, meaning only to inform the people for what reason Jesus was put to death, unintentionally attested his innocence. Had Jesus *falsely pretended* to be the King of

[a] Luke xxiii. 2. [b] John xviii. 36, 37. and 1 Tim. i. 16. [c] ver. 12.

the Jews, he would have been guilty of fraud and imposture: but as he really was what he pretended to be, the title placed over his head was nothing more than a plain truth, containing not only no crime at all, but not even the smallest charge of crime. What could be a stronger testimony in his favour than this?

The testimony itself contained the most important truth that could possibly be affirmed: it declared that Jesus was the King of Israel, that very King predicted in the prophets[d], even "Messiah the Prince, who should be cut off, not for his own sins[e]," but for the sins of others. And, that it might be universally known, it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin; (the three languages most known in the world at that time:) so that, in fact, Pilate himself became the first preacher of a crucified Redeemer.]

Whether the precise mode of expressing the accusation was intentional on the part of Pilate, or not, we cannot but wonder at,

II. The firmness of Pilate in relation to it—

That the superscription would give great offence, we may easily conceive: for the priests, so far from acknowledging Jesus as their king, had got sentence of death pronounced against him for arrogating to himself that honour. They did indeed expect the promised Messiah, and supposed that he would erect a temporal kingdom amongst them; and this very expectation made them feel still more keenly the indignity which this inscription offered them; since it intimated, that any person who should hereafter attempt to rescue them from the dominion of Cæsar, should be crucified in like manner.

Without delay they make known to Pilate their wishes upon the subject, and propose an alteration in the words: but behold, he is firm and immoveable: his only answer to them is, "What I have written, I have written."

Now to understand his answer aright, we must consider him,

1. As incensed against them—

[They had urged, and (so to speak) compelled him to give sentence against a man whom he knew to be innocent: and,

[d] Jer. xxiii. 5, 6. Zech. ix. 9. [e] Dan. ix. 26.

being condemned in his own conscience, he could not but feel exceedingly displeased with them. The alteration which they proposed in the inscription was very trifling: it might have been made without in the least derogating from his authority: and, no doubt, if he had not been offended with them, he would have readily complied. But to a person irritated, no concession appears trifling. He felt himself injured by them: and therefore would not give way, even for a moment. His pride was hurt: and he determined that he would make them sensible of his displeasure. Hence he not only refused their petition, but expressed his refusal in terms most authoritative, most contemptuous, and most repulsive.]

2. As over-ruled by God—

[Though perfectly free to follow the dictates of his own mind, he was undoubtedly under the influence of God; just as Balaam was, who though of himself disposed to curse Israel, was invariably constrained to bless them[f]. The truth exhibited in that inscription was itself unalterable, and was to be proclaimed to every people of every language under heaven. It was the corner-stone on which all mankind were to build their hopes: and therefore God, who had left Pilate to his natural timidity for the crucifying of his Son, now emboldened him to withstand their renewed solicitations, though in a matter of comparatively no importance[g].

Thus it was on that occasion, and thus it ever shall be; "the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand, and he will do all his will." As far as "the wrath of man will praise him," he will suffer it to act; but the remainder of it he will restrain.]

We may NOTICE from hence,

1. What care God will take of his people—

[He permitted his Son to be put to death, because that was necessary for the accomplishment of the Divine purposes in the work of redemption. But he took care that all his enemies should attest his innocence: and where so small a concession as that before us might have counteracted their testimony, he makes a poor shaking reed as firm and immoveable as a rock. Who then will be afraid to trust him? Who will not cheerfully commit his reputation, his interest, yea his very life, into the hands of such an almighty Friend? Know, beloved, that he is to his people both a sun and a shield; and that whilst he directs and invigorates them by his beams, he will protect and uphold them by his power — — — "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice, and the multitude of the isles be glad thereof."]

[f] Numb. xxii. 18, 38. and xxiii. 8, 11, 12, 26. and xxiv. 10, 13.
[g] Acts iv. 27, 28.

2. In what way they must attain to his kingdom—

[That which is the highest privilege of the saints may be made the strongest article of accusation against them. In the primitive times, to be a Christian was to expose oneself to all manner of calumny and danger. And thus at this time, to be numbered with the saints is to be classed with enthusiasts, fools, and hypocrites. A man need have no other inscription over his head than, "This is one of the saints," and he shall never want for contempt or hatred. Let him call himself "a King," and men will be ready to cry out, "Crucify him! crucify him!" But this should not discourage us: it is the way the Saviour trod before us. We, like him, are kings[h]; we have a crown and "a kingdom given to us[i]:" and in due time shall be "seated with Christ on his throne, even as he now sitteth on his Father's throne[k]." But we must "suffer with him, if we would reign with him[l]." Even he, "though a Son, was made perfect through sufferings;" and we also must "go through much tribulation, before we can enter into the kingdom of heaven[m]." Let us then consider what he endured for us; and "let us arm ourselves with the same mind[n]:" and let us rest assured, that, "if we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified together[o]."]

[h] Rev. i. 6. [i] Luke xxii. 29. [k] Rev. iii. 21.
[l] 2 Tim. ii. 12. [m] Acts xiv. 22. [n] 1 Pet. iv. 1.
[o] Rom. viii. 17.

OUTLINE NO. 1723

CASTING LOTS FOR OUR LORD'S VESTURE.

John xix. 23, 24. *Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the Scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did.*

ON reading the history of our blessed Lord, we cannot but be struck with the extreme simplicity with which the most important circumstances of it are related. The historians never go out of their way to impress things on our minds; but leave truth to

speak for itself. Even when they come to the last scene of his life, where we might have expected them to dilate upon his sufferings in order to affect our hearts, they pass over the whole transaction without a comment, and content themselves with barely mentioning the fact, that "he was crucified." But, while they seem almost unfeeling towards their Divine Master, they specify very minutely those occurrences which marked the accomplishment of prophecy: and, as if indifferent about the agonies which he was enduring, they descend to tell us, how the soldiers who had nailed him to the cross occupied themselves in the disposal of his garments. We should be ready to disregard this record as uninteresting and uninstructive: but no circumstance that took place at that time should be uninteresting to us; nor will this, if duly considered, be uninstructive. On the contrary, this very record will give us an insight into some of the deepest points that can be offered to our consideration.

It will give us an insight into,

I. The nature of prophecy—

[Prophecy springs not from man's conjectures, but from a Divine revelation[a]. The prophets, so far from being the source and authors of their own predictions, could not even understand them, any farther than they were illuminated by that very Spirit by whose immediate agency they were inspired[b]. In some cases they were not even conscious that they foretold any thing[c]. Perhaps this was the case much more frequently than is generally supposed. Through the greatest part of the psalm quoted in our text, David spake primarily respecting himself, though in some parts he was "moved by the Holy Ghost" to speak what had no reference at all but to the Messiah, whom he typified. That he did not understand his own expressions, we can have no doubt. He might perhaps be conscious that he was uttering that which should, in some way or other, have its accomplishment in the Messiah: but he had no clew in his own experience to lead him to the interpretation of his own words: he never had his "hands and feet pierced;" much less had he ever his garments disposed of in the way he mentions[d].

[a] 2 Pet. i. 21.
[b] 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.
[c] John xi. 49—52.
[d] Ps. xxii. 16, 18.

Why then, it may be said, did he so express himself, that nobody could understand him, till the event had actually taken place? We answer, it is of the very nature of prophecy to be obscure; yea, it is altogether essential to the designs of prophecy: for suppose a prophecy to be perfectly clear, the friends of religion would be ready to exert themselves to fulfil it, as the enemies of religion would be to counteract it. Thus, if it were not accomplished, the religion which it was to support would be called an imposture; and, if accomplished, its accomplishment would be considered as the effect only of human prudence. This is evident, from what actually took place in relation to the prophecies respecting the kingly office of Christ, and his resurrection. The people who saw that he could feed multitudes with very small provision, and heal the sick of whatever malady they had, and even raise the dead, concluded, that he was the king whom they expected to reign over the whole world; and therefore sought to make him a king by force: nor could he prevent it, but by withdrawing miraculously from their presence. On the other hand, his enemies, who had heard him say that he would rise again the third day, set a guard around his grave on purpose to prevent it. In this manner persons would have acted in reference to all the prophecies, if all had been equally clear: and thus prophecy, as a mean of establishing the true religion, would be superseded by a continued series of miracles; and Christianity would lose its strongest evidence and support.

The true nature of prophecy is not anywhere more clearly seen than in the passage before us: for, till it was accomplished, no human being could understand its import; nor after its accomplishment could any one mistake it.]

II. The origin of Christianity—

[Let any one who imagines Christianity to be a mere human contrivance, ask himself, whether any person, or set of persons, wishing to impose a religion upon the world, would be foolish enough to predict, that its founder's clothes should be disposed of in so strange a way? The event must be so entirely out of their own power, that they would never subject their imposture to such a test as this. But this event was predicted a thousand years before it came to pass; and the psalm in which it was contained was universally acknowledged by the Jews to refer to their Messiah.

How then can we account for its accomplishment? Is there any appearance of contrivance in the matter? None at all. The Jews put Christ to death for pretending to be their Messiah; and therefore would not at the same time contrive a plan that should prove him the Messiah. Besides, the thing was not done by Jews, but heathens; who were perfectly un-

conscious of doing any thing worthy of attention. If Jesus had not happened to have a particular kind of garment, which was woven without a seam, and had probably been made a present to him by some of those women who ministered unto him, they would have had no more reason for casting lots for that, than for the other which they divided among them. And, after all, he had but just before been stript of his clothing, not only to be scourged, but that, being arrayed in mock majesty, he might be made an object of universal derision; and in that dress had sentence of condemnation been passed upon him: so that, if God had not signally interposed to incline them to put his own garment upon him again, this prophecy had never been fulfilled. See then how minute was the prophecy, and how exact its accomplishment! If they had cast lots at all, the probability was that the whole would have formed but two lots, and that none would be torn in pieces: but as God ordained it to be, so it was; and from thence arises an indisputable evidence, that the religion which was to be confirmed by it, was from God. Indeed, the more insignificant the transaction itself was, the more decisive is the proof arising from it.

In confirmation of this statement we would call your attention to the very words of our text; where the fulfilling of the Scripture is said to be the primary object of that arrangement: and again it is added, "These things *therefore* the soldiers did." We are not to understand from this, that *the soldiers* had this object in view; (for there was not any thing further from their minds:) but *God inclined their minds* to it for that end. Every thing which the Scriptures had spoken respecting the Messiah, must needs be fulfilled; and *therefore* this, as well as every other point, must be accomplished in him[e].]

III. The government of the universe—

[" Known unto God are all his works from the foundation of the world[f]." Nothing was left to chance: but every thing was both foreseen and foreordained.

It may be asked then, are we mere machines? I answer, no. God leaves us free agents; but makes use of our free agency for the accomplishment of his own purposes. This he did in reference to his Son. There was not any thing "done to him, which God's hand, and God's counsel, had not determined before to be done[g]." Nevertheless, all who bore any part in those transactions, were perfectly free in every thing they did. None were *compelled* by any overbearing power; but all followed the bent of their own minds. Judas was actuated by covetousness; the priests by envy; Pilate by fear; and the

[e] Luke xxii. 37. John x. 35. [f] Acts xv. 18.
[g] Acts iv. 28. and xiii. 27, 29.

soldiers, who cast lots for one garment, whilst they divided the other in four parts, acted from a regard to their own personal interests. But God made use of their respective weaknesses for the accomplishment of his own designs.

It is in this manner that God is carrying on his plans on the great theatre of the world. Ambition stimulates one; jealousy restrains another; fear paralyzes, or divisions distract, others: but by all, God works his sovereign will, and renders all the dispositions and pursuits of men subservient to his own eternal purpose. He uses the great conquerors now, precisely as he did Sennacherib of old, for the effecting of his own unerring counsels. "Howbeit, they mean not so, neither doth their heart think so; but it is in their heart to destroy, and to cut off nations not a few[h]:" but "they are only his rod, and the staff of his indignation," which he will break and cast into the fire, as soon as they have executed their appointed task[i].

It is thus also that God governs his Church. The very people who most labour to destroy it, are sometimes made unwilling instruments of its enlargement. This was particularly the case in the persecution that took place after the death of Stephen; when God rendered the scattering of the Christians the means of diffusing the knowledge of the Gospel throughout the world[k]. And every individual, if he could trace back all the events of his former life, would find, that many circumstances, as little connected with religion as the curiosity of Zaccheus[l], or the dishonesty of Onesimus[m], have been overruled by a gracious Providence for good.

How little did these soldiers think of being witnesses for Christ! As little do we think that every thing, however small or casual, is ordered of God, and made a necessary link in the chain of his eternal counsels. To every thing he assigns its proper limit; "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further." Men devise their way, "but the Lord directeth their steps:" he draws them imperceptibly, but effectually; yet not as stocks and stones, but by means of their own understanding and will: "He draws them with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love[n]."]

It is not however for the formation of *theories* only that this subject is useful: it is equally beneficial in a *practical* view.

We may LEARN from it,

1. To adore God for his mercies to us in times past—

[h] Isai. x. 7. [i] Isai. x. 5, 6, 15, 16. [k] Acts viii. 3, 4.
[l] Luke xix. 2—9. [m] Phil. ver. 10—18. [n] Hos. xi. 14.

[Who is it that has made us to differ from the most abandoned on earth, or the most miserable in hell? Is it not the Lord? and have not many of the occasions on which he has extended mercy to us been as much unsought for, and at the time unnoticed, as if we had been utterly independent of him? Let us remember then to whom we are indebted for all the temporal and spiritual blessings we enjoy: and let every thing be improved by us "for the praise of the glory of his grace"———]

2. To seek his guidance and protection in future—

[Who can tell what consequences may ensue from one single step? perhaps the eternal preservation or ruin of our souls. Assuredly, if left to ourselves one moment, we shall fall and perish. But God sees effects in their causes; and in his eyes eternity itself is but a single point. In his hands then we shall be safe. Whatever enemies may menace our destruction, he will ride in the whirlwind and direct the storm. Only let us not lean to our own understanding, but in all our ways acknowledge him, and he will "never leave us till he has fulfilled all the good things that he has spoken concerning us"———]

3. To submit with cheerfulness to any dispensations, however adverse they may appear—

[Who that recollects the testimony of Joseph after all his multiplied afflictions, will not be ashamed of giving way to impatience under trials? "God sent me here before you," says he to his brethren, "to preserve life." Above all, who that reflects on the issue of our Saviour's sufferings, will repine at being made a partaker of them? We have the promises of God on our side, "and the Scripture cannot be broken." We have our appointed measure to fill up, as well as he: and the termination of our trials will resemble his. Let us wait then the Lord's leisure. If we see not distinctly what his design is in this or that affliction, let it suffice, that "what we know not now, we shall know hereafter." We have already seen abundant reason in past times to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted:" and the time is coming when we shall say the same in reference to our present trials. We shall see, that they were a necessary link in the chain of Providence, for the advancing of his glory in our salvation.]

OUTLINE NO. 1724

JESUS COMMENDS HIS MOTHER TO JOHN'S CARE.

John xix. 26, 27. *When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.*

IN the hour of our Lord's crucifixion, when nearly the whole of his Disciples had forsaken him, his female relatives adhered to him, and, together with John the beloved Disciple, preferred the pain and danger of a continued attendance on him, to the repose and safety of a disgraceful flight. To this kindness of theirs the dying Jesus was not insensible. On the contrary, he took that opportunity to secure to his mother a protector through all her remaining days; and to confer on John an honour, which even an angel might well have envied. The transaction, being one of the last in which the Saviour was engaged, demands particular attention. We propose to consider it,

I. As an emblem for our instruction—

Many of our Lord's miracles were certainly intended to shadow forth the spiritual blessings which he came to bestow: and some of his actions also were plainly adapted to the same end[a]. We do not indeed assert, that such was the intention of the fact recorded in our text; yet we may without impropriety remark, that it is well calculated to shew,

1. The care which Jesus takes of his suffering people—

[The time was now come, when, according to the prediction of the aged Simeon, "a sword pierced through the soul" of the virgin mother. But Jesus, though in the very agonies of death himself, was mindful of her, and committed her to one, who should supply his place, and be to her as an affectionate and duteous son. His removal from this lower world has in no wise diminished his concern for his afflicted

[a] See John ix. 39. and xiii. 8.

people. As the High-priest of his Church, he is constantly attending to the interests of all its members. He is "not such an high-priest as cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities:" in the days of his flesh, "he was in all points tempted like as we are, though without sin[b]:" and since, as well as before, his incarnation, "in all our afflictions he is afflicted[c]." Are we in temporal distress? he engages that "bread shall be given us, and our water be sure[d]:" and if our wants be of a spiritual nature, he assures us, that he will "never suffer the soul of the righteous to famish[e]," but will make *all* grace abound towards us, that we, "having *always all-sufficiency* in *all* things, may abound unto *every* good work[f]."]

2. The subserviency of the whole creation to his will—

[Without hesitation, John accepted the trust; and no doubt he executed it with fidelity and joy. In like manner the whole creation is ready to obey the command of Christ, and to fulfil his gracious appointments. All the hosts of heaven would, at the first intimation of his will, fly to our relief. The birds of the air would sustain us[g]; the fishes of the sea preserve us[h]; the clouds would supply us with daily nutriment; and the rocks give from their bosoms an unceasing stream for our support[i]. The very enemies of God and his people should open an asylum for us, in obedience to his word; "Let mine outcasts dwell with *thee*, Moab: be *thou* a covert to them from the face of the spoiler[k]." Hence he bids us "to cast our care on him;" and encourages the most destitute of mankind to expect from him a seasonable supply of all needful blessings; "Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive: and let thy widows trust in me[l]."]

Even though the foregoing views should not be thought necessarily connected with the subject, they are profitable in themselves, and are easily deducible from it: but no doubt at all can arise respecting this act of our Lord's,

II. As a pattern for our imitation—

Whatever Jesus did *as the Messiah*, was peculiar to himself; but whatever he did merely *as a man*, that is to be imitated by us; for "he set us an example,

[b] Heb. iv. 15.
[c] Isai. lxiii. 9.
[d] Isai. xxxiii. 16.
[e] Prov. x. 3.
[f] 2 Cor. ix. 8.
[g] 1 Kings xvii. 4.
[h] Jonah i. 17.
[i] Neh. ix. 20.
[k] Isai. xvi. 4.
[l] Jer. xlix. 11.

that we should follow his steps." His Apostles also we are "to follow, as far as they were followers of him." Now the fact which is here recorded, affords us an excellent pattern,

1. Of filial piety—

[Our Lord, during his youthful days, is particularly spoken of as having been "subject to his parents[m]:" and therein he has set an example to children in every age. But it is not in honouring their parents only, or in obeying their commands, that the duty of children consists; it is no less their duty to make provision for their parents, in case they should by any means be brought into circumstances to need support. This is particularly enjoined by God himself; "If any widow have children, or nephews[n] (grand-children), let *them* learn first to shew pity at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God[o]." This duty supersedes charity itself, on a supposition that the two be incompatible with each other: because the support of parents is an act of justice; it is a *return* which we are bound to make for all the care and kindness they exercised towards us in our early days: and the claims of justice can never yield to those of generosity: indeed so indispensable is this duty, that if we do not perform it, we practically "deny the faith, and make ourselves worse than infidels[p]." Moreover we should endeavour, as far as circumstances will admit of it, to make provision for our parents in the event of our own removal; that so we may requite them for all their love to us, whilst we were incapable of the smallest exertion for ourselves. If our parents do not need support from us, we must not on that account imagine that our Lord's example is inapplicable to us; for that example shews equally, that it is our duty to consult the comfort of their minds, as well as the support of their bodies: and I pray God that all young people amongst us may lay this thought to heart! — — —]

2. Of Christian love—

[Though John had probably no great abundance for himself, he doubtless thankfully admitted the mother of our Lord to a participation of what he had; regarding her altogether as though she had been his own mother. In this same light should we regard all the sons and daughters of affliction, especially "those who are of the household of faith." What our Lord said of all who did his Father's will, we, for his sake, should say also; "The same is my brother and sister and mother[q]." We should consider the aged, the infirm, the young,

[m] Luke ii. 51. [n] ἔκγονα. [o] 1 Tim. v. 4.
[p] 1 Tim. v. 8. [q] Matt. xii. 50.

the destitute, as having a claim upon us for all the aid that we can reasonably afford them out of the provision which God has made for us. We should look upon our property as a trust committed to our charge, to be improved for God, and to be accounted for to him in the day of judgment. And, if the demands upon us be urgent, we must not on that account give grudgingly or of necessity, but rejoice that God has entrusted us with talents for such a blessed use[r]. As to the comfort arising from such an use of our property, it is beyond all comparison greater than any that can arise from personal indulgence: we entreat all therefore to seek their happiness in making others happy, and to tread in the steps of Him, who impoverished himself that he might enrich us[s], and submitted to the most cruel death that we might inherit eternal life.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are afflicted—

[Those who are most dear to the Lord, are often the most afflicted. This was particularly the case with the mother of our Lord: and we are told in general, that "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." It is possible too that he may bring us into troubles, from whence there appears not any probable method of escape; but he knows the fittest time to interpose in our behalf. He might have arranged matters for his mother long before: but he would not; because he knew what would be on the whole the fittest season. Thus then let us wait the Lord's leisure, and be strong in faith, giving glory to him: and if at any time we be tempted to fear that he has forsaken and forgotten us, let us instantly check the dishonourable thought; believing that, though it *is* possible that a mother should forget her sucking child, it is *not* possible that He should ever be unmindful of us[t]: nay, if, like Mary, we be brought into troubles for his sake, we shall receive from him "an hundred-fold in this world, and in the world to come eternal life[u]."]

2. Them that are at ease—

[If you were under the heaviest pressure of affliction yourselves, it would be no reason for being indifferent to the afflictions of others: but if God has been pleased to screen you from trials, you should be the more earnest in "bearing the burthens of others, that you may thereby fulfil the law of Christ[x]." Remember, that sympathy is one of the finest feel-

[r] If this were the subject of a *Charity Sermon*, the particular claims of the Institution pleaded for might be stated here.

[s] 2 Cor. viii. 9.

[t] Isai. xlix. 14—16.

[u] Mark x. 29, 30.

[x] Gal. vi. 2.

ings of our nature, and exceedingly fitted to purify us from our remaining dross. Cultivate it then, and value every opportunity of exercising and strengthening that principle in your souls. It is said by Solomon, that "it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting:" and this witness is true. Nothing tends more to create in us a thankful heart, than the seeing of the miseries to which others are exposed. Are you then, like John, disciples beloved of your Lord?—endeavour to tread in the steps of John: and if, with Peter, you are confident that you feel in yourselves a love to Christ, then comply with the command of Christ, and "feed his lambs, and feed his sheep[y]."]

[y] John xxi. 15—17.

OUTLINE NO. 1725

OUR SAVIOUR'S DEATH.

John xix. 28—30. *After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a spunge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.*

NOTHING but Divine grace can change the hearts of men. Signs and wonders may alarm and terrify, and may produce a momentary conviction on the mind; but unless the Spirit of God work in and by them, they will leave the soul unhumbled and unrenewed. It is probable that the darkness which prevailed during the three last hours of our Saviour's life, produced an awe upon the minds of all; but yet it wrought no permanent change on any: for, when our blessed Lord poured out his complaint respecting the dereliction of his soul, his enemies mocked and insulted him, pretending to understand him as calling Elijah to his aid, when they could not but know that he was crying to his God. *We* might as easily mistake the sense of the words, "My God, My God," as they could mistake the import of "Eli, Eli:" the resemblance of the sounds was merely a pretext for venting the malice that reigned in their hearts. One

more opportunity only remained for them to shew the enmity that was in their minds against him; and they gladly embraced it: but in that very conduct they added another testimony to the truth of his Messiahship. Their conduct towards him in this particular had been the subject of prophecy; and, when that prophecy was fulfilled, there remained no further occasion for his continuance in the world: he therefore left the world, and went immediately to the bosom of his Father.

Two things are here presented for our consideration;

I. The completion of prophecy—

There remained now but one prophecy to be accomplished—

[Every thing relating to the incarnation, life, and death, of the Lord Jesus Christ had been foretold in the minutest manner; and every thing, except that which is spoken in our text, had been fulfilled. The drought occasioned by his long and excruciating agonies both of body and mind, and the method used by his enemies to allay his thirst, had been particularly foretold by the Psalmist[a]. To look for the accomplishment of these things in David is in vain. They never were fulfilled in David, or in any other person whatsoever, except the Lord Jesus Christ.]

That prophecy now received its accomplishment in Christ—

[The thirst predicted, came upon him: he complained of it: and the people filled a spunge with vinegar, and put it on a stalk of hyssop to his mouth. The vinegar was there at hand; it being, when mixed with water, the common drink of the Roman soldiers. Before his crucifixion, his friends had offered him a drink of wine mixed with myrrh, as a cordial to support him under his sufferings; or rather as a stupifying potion, to allay his pain. But of *that* he would not drink; because he would endure all that was necessary to make satisfaction to Divine justice for the sins of men[b]. The vinegar was presented to him by his enemies, who had no desire to sooth his anguish, but only to protract the period of his sufferings, and increase their weight. In this, however, they unconsciously fulfilled the prophecy concerning it, and thereby enabled our Lord to say, "It is finished." All was now finished; all that was

[a] Ps. xxii. 14, 15. and lxix. 21.
[b] Compare Mark xv. 23. with 36

necessary to be done or suffered for the sins of men — — — and nothing remained, but to surrender up that life, which had answered all the ends for which it had been given.]

Immediately upon this followed,

II. The dissolution of our Lord—

Two things are here particularly to be noticed;

1. The voluntariness of his death—

[He had before expressly declared, that "no man could take away his life, but that he should lay it down of himself[c]." And here the correspondence between the prediction and the event is clearly marked. Had the separation of his soul and body been occasioned altogether by his sufferings in a natural way, his strength would have gradually decayed, till he had sunk under them: but behold, immediately before his departure he cried out *repeatedly* with a loud voice; shewing thereby, that his nature was not exhausted, but that he resigned his soul voluntarily into his Father's hands[d]. The Centurion, who superintended his execution, was particularly struck with this, and was convinced by it that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, the Saviour of the world[e]. The very terms used by St. Matthew to express his death confirm this idea. What we translate, "He yielded up the ghost," is literally, "He *dismissed* his spirit[f]:" so clearly did he manifest, even in death itself, that he was truly "the Lord and Prince of life[g]."]

2. His confidence and composure—

[Though he had just complained of the hidings of his Father's face, yet he did not lose the consciousness that God was his Father: on the contrary, with dignified composure he committed his soul into his Father's hands[h]. Often had he spoken of *going to* his Father, just as a man would have spoken of going to a distant land[i]: and now that his time was come, he meekly "bowed his head," and surrendered up his soul, having discharged his appointed office, and filled up his destined measure, both of active and passive obedience. How beautiful does death appear, when thus disarmed of its sting? O that *we* may be enabled thus to meet this king of terrors, and to welcome his arrival as the best of friends!]

Let this affecting subject be IMPROVED by us,

1. For the confirmation of our faith—

[c] John x. 17, 18. [d] Matt. xxvii. 50. [e] Mark xv. 37, 39.
[f] ἀφῆκε τὸ πνεῦμα. [g] Acts iii. 15. [h] Luke xxiii. 46.
[i] John xvi. 16, 28. and xvii. 11, 13.

[The wonderful minuteness of prophecy, surveyed as it must be in the accomplishment of the predictions, affords the strongest ground for our faith and hope. St. Peter laid great stress upon it in his addresses to the Jewish people, and urged the consideration of it as an encouragement to them to expect from Christ all the blessings of grace and glory[k]. To you then would we make our appeal: in whom were these things ever verified, if not in Christ? or what room is there for doubt respecting his Messiahship, when he has fulfilled every thing which the Messiah was either to do or suffer? I may add too, what doubt can exist respecting the accomplishment of all the promises to those who truly believe in him? Let us view him thus as "the Foundation which God has laid in Zion;" and let us expect from him whatever his grace has promised, and our necessities require.]

2. For the regulation of our conduct—

[We have seen the Saviour's example both in life and death: and in conformity to that we should desire both to live and die. Let us not be anxious to depart from life, till we have completed the work which God has given us to do — — — On the other hand, let us not be afraid of death, but regard it as a departure to our Father's house. The words of David seem to have been referred to by our Lord on this occasion, and they are admirably suited to the case of a dying believer[l]: and to one who can use them in faith, death is nothing more than falling asleep in the bosom of our Lord[m] — — —]

[k] Acts iii. 18, 19. [l] Ps. xxxi. 5. [m] Acts vii. 59, 60.

OUTLINE NO. 1726

CHRIST'S WORK FINISHED.

John xix. 30. *It is finished.*

THESE, with the exception of the words with which our blessed Lord commended his spirit into his Father's hands, were the last words which he spake, previous to his dissolution. In the original, they are comprehended in one word[a]: and since the foundation of the world there never was a single word uttered, in which such diversified and important matter was contained. Every word indeed that proceeded from our Saviour's lips deserves the most attentive

[a] Τετέλεσται..

consideration: but this eclipses all. To do justice to it, is beyond the ability of men or angels: its height, and depth, and length, and breadth, are absolutely unsearchable. But that its import may be somewhat more clearly seen, we propose to shew,

I. The truths contained in it—

Our blessed Lord not having expressly stated what he alluded to as finished, we are left to gather his meaning from a general view of that work which he came to accomplish. We understand then, that when he uttered this word, the following things were finished:

1. The fulfilment of prophecy—

[Prophecy was of two kinds, one consisting of typical institutions, the other of positive declarations. Now both these kinds of prophecy received their accomplishment in the death of Christ.

The brazen serpent, the daily sacrifice, the burning of the flesh of the sin-offerings *without the camp*, with various other ordinances, shadowed forth the death of Christ by crucifixion without the walls of Jerusalem; and at that moment, when our Lord was about to resign his spirit, were all fulfilled: for he was then "suffering without the gate[b];" and was "lifted up, that all who believed in him might be healed" of their wounds[c]; and was "the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world[d]."

The declarations of the prophets were so numerous and minute, that a history of our Lord might be compiled from them, fuller, in many respects, than is contained in any one of the Evangelists. The person that betrayed him, the manner in which his trial should be conducted, the sufferings he should undergo previous to the final execution of his sentence, the death to which he should be doomed, the persons in whose company he should suffer, the manner in which his clothes should be disposed of, the very taunts with which he should be insulted in his dying hour, were all fulfilled as exactly, as if the agents in this bloody tragedy had designed to accomplish the predictions concerning him. There remained only one single prophecy to be fulfilled: and who would have conceived that ever *that* should be fulfilled? It was customary for the friends of the persons who were executed to give them "wine mingled with myrrh," in order to blunt the edge of their sufferings: and the friends of our Lord had offered him such a potion; but he would not drink of it, because he would do

[b] Heb. xiii. 11, 12. [c] John iii. 14, 15. [d] John i. 29.

nothing that should have a tendency to diminish his sufferings[e]: but when, in his last moments, he said, "I thirst," the cruel soldiers, wishing only to mock him, and augment his anguish[f], dipped a spunge in vinegar, and gave him that to drink; and thus fulfilled that prophecy of David, "In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink[g]. This done, no other prophecy remained to be fulfilled; and therefore our Lord instantly said, "It is finished."]

2. The work of Redemption—

[Two things were undertaken by our Lord, and were to be done by him in order to man's redemption; *the penalties of the law were to be endured* by him, in order that Divine justice might be satisfied for our sins; and *the demands of the law were to be obeyed* by him, in order that sinners, who could have no righteousness of their own, might be made righteous in him. Both these things were now completed. Our blessed Lord had obeyed the law in its fullest extent: not the smallest defect could be found in him: man could find none; Satan could find none; God himself could find none: for "he did always the things that pleased the Father;" and "in him was no sin." By his obedience, the law, which we had violated, was "magnified and made honourable:" and "a righteousness was brought in," a righteousness which shall be unto all and upon all them that believe, and which is amply sufficient for the justification of all who trust in it. Moreover all was now endured that was necessary to make an atonement for our sins. Did we deserve shame, and condemnation, and misery? did we deserve to have the face of God hid from us, and the vials of his wrath poured out upon us, and to be consigned over to everlasting death? All this he suffered, as far as was compatible with his nature, and as far as was necessary for the satisfaction of Divine justice. He was not indeed actually dead; but the moment was arrived for his surrendering up his life; and therefore he could properly say, "It is finished."]

3. The salvation of man—

[All that was necessary for man's salvation was now effected. Nothing remained to be done, in order to the perfecting of his work on earth, or to the forming of a perfect ground for man's acceptance with God. It is true, that man must *repent:* but he need not to repent *in order to make satisfaction for his sins:* no repentance of man can add to the value of Christ's sacrifice. Men must repent, in order to justify God in the denunciations of his wrath, and to evince

[e] Mark xv. 23. [f] Luke xxiii. 36. [g] Ps. lxix. 21.

their abhorrence of their past ways, and to bring their souls to a fit state for the enjoyment of God's mercy: but to atone for sin, he needs not to repent: the offering of the body of Jesus Christ upon the cross is a sufficient propitiation for the sins of the whole world. It is true also, that man must obey: but he need not to obey *in order to form for himself a justifying righteousness before God:* he can never add to the perfection of Christ's righteousness; and any attempt to add to it will defeat, instead of furthering, his acceptance through it. Whatever obedience men may render for the honouring of God, and the adorning of their profession, they must renounce it utterly in point of dependence, and must look for salvation solely through the righteousness of Christ[h]. Nothing remains for man but to accept the salvation which Christ has purchased: and if he be enabled in his last hour (like the dying thief) to rely on the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus, he shall as assuredly be saved, as if he had repented and obeyed a thousand years. We do not say this to lessen the importance of repentance and obedience (for in their proper place they are of infinite importance); but only to explain and vindicate our Lord's assertion in the text.]

The meaning of our Lord's declaration being ascertained, let us bring forth,

II. The truths to be deduced from it—

Selecting such inferences only as are most prominent, we observe,

1. That there is a sure ground of hope for all who feel their need of mercy—

[" If persons of a desponding frame would state what they could wish God to do for them, in order to remove their fears; we are well persuaded, not only that every thing they can desire has been already done, but that infinitely more has been done for them than they could even ask or think. Would they have an atonement made for their sins, even such an atonement as shall perfectly satisfy Divine justice, and discharge the utmost farthing of their debt? We must say to them, 'It is done;' " It is finished." Would they have a perfect righteousness wrought out for them? Would they be invited and commanded by God himself to clothe themselves with it as a robe, so that not even the piercing eye of God should be able to behold a spot or blemish in them? " It is finished." Would they have the gift of the Holy Spirit purchased for them, so that they may be assured of almighty aid in all their difficulties and conflicts? " It is finished." Let them

[h] Phil. iii. 9.

state what they will, (provided it be really calculated to inspire confidence, and suited to the condition of the Church militant,) and we do not hesitate to say respecting it, "It is finished." Why then should any despond, as though their guilt were too great to be forgiven, or their corruptions too strong to be subdued? Let the humble and contrite only reflect on this dying declaration of our Lord, and they can never want encouragement to trust in him.]

2. That they in whom a good work is begun, have reason to hope that it shall be carried on and perfected to the day of Christ—

[The work of bringing sinners to repentance, and of renewing them after the Divine image, is committed to Christ. "He is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins." In him, according to the Father's appointment, all fulness dwells; and out of his fulness all his people are to receive the grace that shall be needful and sufficient for them. Now if in the arduous work which Christ undertook to do *for* men, he persisted till he could say, "It is finished;" why should he not do the same in the work that he has engaged to accomplish *in* them? If he stop short in this, it must be either from a want of *power*, or a want of *inclination*, to persist in it. But it cannot be from want of *power;* since it is surely an easier thing to preserve life than to give it; and therefore if he have given it, he cannot want power to maintain it. Nor can it be from a want of *inclination;* for, if he had not been carried on by an irresistible inclination to save us, he would not have persisted in his former work; he would have put away the bitter cup from his lips, instead of drinking it, as he did, to the very dregs. If therefore he drew not back in the former case, we may be sure he will not in this case: he will never cease from working effectually in us, till he can say, "It is finished." That this deduction is clear and scriptural, we have very abundant evidence. The prophet declares, that "He who has laid the foundation of the spiritual temple, will also finish it:" and that he will bring forth the top-stone thereof with shoutings, crying, "Grace, grace, unto it[i]." On this account the Apostle also calls him, "The Author and Finisher of our faith;" and declares himself "*confident* of this very thing, that He who hath begun the good work, will perform it till the day of Christ[k]." Let believers then "cast their care on Him who careth for them," and know assuredly, that "he will keep the feet of his saints, and "perfect that which concerneth them."]

3. That those who have obtained mercy have the strongest possible incentive to maintain good works—

[i] Zech. iv. 7, 9. [k] Phil. i. 6.

[We have before stated, that Christ has done every thing that was necessary for man's salvation; and that nothing remains for man to add to the finished work of Christ. But we also noticed, that, though man has nothing to do *for the purpose of meriting salvation, or for laying a foundation of his acceptance with God*, yet in other points of view he has abundant occasion to work; yea, he is commanded to "work out his salvation with fear and trembling." We have no other way of proving the truth of our faith, or the sincerity of our love, than by bringing forth the fruits of righteousness. Shall this then be thought a wearisome task by any of us? Shall we wish to intermit our labours, or to stop short of the highest attainments? Surely not: for if Christ finished the work assigned him, because of his love to us, we can do no less than persist in our work, whereby we are to evidence our love to him. Let us then "go on towards perfection:" let us "forget what is behind, and press forward towards that which is before:" let us "work while our day lasts;" that in the evening of our life we may be able to say with Christ, "Father, I have glorified thee on earth, I have finished the work which thou hast given me to do." Then, while hypocrites and apostates shall take up this expression in reference to their hopes of salvation, and say, "My day of grace is finished, and all possibility of obtaining mercy is finished;" we shall shout in heaven, "It is finished, it is finished!" "fears, temptations, conflicts, are all finished!" "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith;" and nothing now remains to me but an eternity of uninterrupted happiness and glory.]

OUTLINE NO. 1727

THE TREATMENT OF OUR LORD'S BODY ON THE CROSS.

John xix. 31—37. *The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the Scrip-*

ture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another Scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.

UNSEARCHABLE is the depravity of the human heart. Who that had not seen it recorded in the Holy Scriptures, would conceive it possible, that those who felt no remorse for having crucified the Lord of Glory, should yet pretend to feel such reverence for the Sabbath-day, as not to endure the thought of its being profaned by his body remaining on the cross on that day? Horrid hypocrisy! This was indeed to "strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel." What if there were extraordinary reasons for sanctifying that day, as being the *first* day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread[a]; could they be supposed to operate on a mind that was dead to all sense of justice or of mercy? But all was wisely ordered and overruled by God, who by this means wrought more effectually to the establishing of the claims of Jesus to the Messiahship: for from hence arose *their singular treatment of our Lord's body;* which, together with *the instruction to be gathered from it,* will form the subject of our present discourse.

Let us consider,

I. Their singular treatment of our Lord's body—

It was truly singular—

[The Romans were accustomed to leave upon the cross those who were so put to death, in order that they might be devoured by birds of prey. Agreeably therefore to their customs, the bodies of Jesus and of the malefactors should have been kept upon the cross. But the Jews, who on some occasions put persons to death by hanging, were forbidden to keep them on the tree all night[b]: and, as the next day was so great a day, they thought it right to interest themselves with the governor to adopt on that occasion the Jewish, instead of the Roman, plan; proposing however, that the legs of the

[a] Lev. xxiii. 5—7. Whitby, and others after him, appear to me to be under a mistake in calling it the *second* day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the day for presenting the *sheaf of new corn;* which was to be, not *on* the sabbath-day, but on the morrow *after* it. Lev. xxiii. 15, 16.

[b] Deut. xxi. 23.

crucified persons should be broken, in order to effect and secure their death; thus making up by increased agony what might be equivalent to the longer duration of their misery. Permission is granted; the order given; and in part executed: the legs of both the malefactors were broken; but, our Lord being already dead, the soldiers forbore to execute this order upon him. But one of the soldiers, wantonly and of his own mind, thrust a spear into his side; from whence issued a stream of blood and water; the water flowing from the pericardium, and the blood from the heart itself.

Now this we call *singular:* for it was strange, that an order given in relation to him as well as the other two, should be executed on *them*, and not on *him;* and it was strange also that an unauthorized act of violence should be committed upon *him*, and not on *them:* for, if done to *them*, it would have been an act of mercy; but, as done to *him*, it was only an act of malice, as impotent as it was inhuman.]

But God had wise ends in permitting this—

[There were prophecies yet remaining to be accomplished: and it was necessary that every part of Scripture should be fulfilled. Now it had been ordained respecting the paschal lamb, that "not a bone of it should be broken[c]." This lamb was intended to be a type of Christ; and that peculiar appointment in the type must be verified in the antitype: and, if not verified in him, Christ's claim to the Messiahship must be void. Behold then, how nearly Jesus' title to the Messiahship was destroyed! The proposal of breaking the legs was made, and acceded to, in reference to him as well as to the malefactors who were crucified with him: it was also executed first on one of the malefactors, then on the other. Why does not the man proceed? Why does he presume to disobey the order? Who has told him to exercise his own discretion? Who interferes about the matter, or attempts either to restrain or to dissuade the executioner. Had he but given the intended blow, there had been an end to all Jesus' pretensions to the Messiahship. But an invisible hand restrained him; God himself overruled his mind; and therefore overruled it, that the Scripture might not be broken.

But why does one of the soldiers take upon him to offer an indignity to the body of Jesus, without any commission or order from his superiors? There was another prophecy to be fulfilled, which had said, that the Jews should look on Him whom they had pierced[d]:" therefore God put it into the heart of his enemies to do to him what they did *not to the others*, and to refrain from doing to *him* what they did *to the others;* to

[c] Exod. xii. 46. Numb. xv. 12. [d] Zech. xii. 10.

do to *him* what they were *not ordered*, and to refrain from doing what they *were ordered*. If this also had not been done, our Lord's claim to the Messiahship had failed; and equally so, if the spear, instead of piercing between the bones, had struck a rib. But there are no such things as casualties, where God's will is concerned: for though every person is a free agent in what he does, he acts no less certainly, than if God used him as an involuntary machine: "God's counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure[e]." The Scriptures had spoken these things, and it was not possible that "one jot or tittle of them should fail."]

The more minutely we consider this subject, the more important will appear,

II The instruction to be gathered from it—

Whilst the foregoing circumstances evince the universal agency of God's providence, they are particularly suited to shew us,

1. What grounds we have for hope—

[The preceding circumstances fully establish the Messiahship of Jesus. But here arises a question; 'How do I know that he really died? I know that he was to "pour out his soul unto *death*[f]:" but am I sure that he really *died?* I know that just before the time he was supposed to die, he spoke repeatedly with so loud a voice, as clearly to prove that his strength was by no means exhausted: I know that "Pilate himself marvelled at his being reported to be so soon dead:" am I sure then that he was not merely in a swoon? for if that were the case, all that he did and suffered can be of no avail for my salvation. If he did not *die*, he did not atone for sin: if he did not *die*, the story of his resurrection is false; and, as the Apostle himself has said, our faith is vain.' But, blessed be God! we are not left to entertain any such doubts: for the officious malice of the soldier who pierced him to the heart, put it beyond a possibility of doubt. Had Jesus been in perfect health, this wound must have killed him instantly: and so publicly was it given, that amidst all the falsehoods invented by the Jews to justify their rejection of him, they never thought of saying that he did not *die*. Behold then, this point is clear: the Messiah was to *die;* and this person, to whom so many testimonies were given, did really *die;* "he became obedient unto *death*, even the death of the cross." The atonement then that was to be made for sin, was really made: the debt due for our iniquities was discharged: and since "He who knew no sin was made a

[e] Isai. xlvi. 10. [f] Isai. liii. 12.

sin-offering for us, we, who have no righteousness, may be made the righteousness of God in him."]

2. What blessings we are to expect—

[The Apostle's solicitude to impress our minds with the things which he beheld, marks unquestionably the importance of them. He declares that his testimony was founded, not on report, but on ocular demonstration; and he demands credit of us upon that ground. But what was it which he so particularly noticed? was it the wound inflicted with the spear? No; it was the issue of water and of blood from the wound. And why was he so particular in the mention of it? it was because there was a deep mystery contained in it, even a typical exhibition of those blessings which we are to receive from him. If we look into the Scriptures, we shall find our justification constantly ascribed to his blood, as cleansing us from sin[g]; and, in like manner, our sanctification as uniformly ascribed to his Spirit[h]. Under the law, these two blessings, together with the mode of their conveyance to our souls, were typified by the blood of the sacrifices, which purged from guilt, and by the various washings, which cleansed from defilement: and they were distinctly promised to the Church by express declarations of God himself[i]. At the introduction of the Christian dispensation, they were mystically represented by the event of which we are speaking, where the blood and water, though flowing in one stream, were distinctly seen. This surprising appearance was designed to shew, that both blessings flow equally from the pierced side of Christ. They flow together, to shew, that we are not to expect the one without the other; and they are kept distinct, to shew, that the blessings are perfectly distinct, and must never be confounded.

We will endeavour, in few words, to render this more clear. Faith and holiness are distinct things, even as blood and water are distinct: faith is necessary to procure for us *a title to* heaven; and holiness is necessary to *make us meet for* heaven: moreover, we must apply to ourselves the blood, in order to obtain the one; and we must also be sprinkled with the water, in order to obtain the other[k]. We must take care also not to mix the two: it is the blood alone that justifies, and the Spirit alone that renews: our justification by faith will not supersede the necessity of holiness; nor will our renovation by the Spirit supersede the necessity of faith in Christ. We must understand the proper offices of each; and must keep each in its proper

[g] Rom. v. 9. Eph. i. 7. and ii. 13. Heb. ix. 14. 1 Pet. i. 19. Rev. i. 5.

[h] Rom. viii. 9, 13. 2 Thess. ii. 13. Eph. v. 25—27.

[i] Zech. xiii. 1. Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26. [k] Heb. x. 22.

place: only we must remember, that they *both* flow from the wounded side of Christ; and that Christ is the only fountain from whence either the one or the other can be derived.

It is possible that this interpretation may appear fanciful: but it will no longer be thought so, if only we consult the exposition which St. John himself has given us of this mystery: "This," says he, "is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood[l]:" from whence we may fairly infer, that "what God has so joined together, we must never attempt to put asunder."]

3. What dispositions we are to cultivate—

[The latter prophecy referred to in our text says, "They shall look on Him whom they have pierced:" and the prophet adds, "They shall mourn and be in bitterness, as one mourneth for his only son." Now this shews the two dispositions which we should exercise towards our adorable Lord and Saviour: we should "look to him" with *penitence* and *faith*. Never can we mourn too deeply, when we reflect that it was *our sin* that crucified the Lord of glory: the Jews and Romans were *the instruments;* but our iniquities were *the cause* of all his sufferings: "He was wounded for *our transgressions*, and bruised for *our iniquities*." Nay more, by our sins we have "crucified the Lord afresh, and put him to an open shame[m]." If then we feel that the Jews have cause to mourn, how should *we* mourn, who have done that with our eyes open, which they did only through the blindness and ignorance of their hearts! Yet, whilst we mourn and are in bitterness, we should not forget that Jesus is the propitiation for our sins, that he "bare them all in his own body on the tree," and that, by becoming a curse for us, he has redeemed us from the curse which our sins had merited. We should resemble the penitent under the law, who, whilst he presented his sacrifice to God and confessed over it his sins, put his hand upon the head of his sacrifice, and transferred his guilt to that as his substitute and surety. Thus should we do: in our view of Christ upon the cross, we should unite penitence and faith: to separate the two will destroy their efficacy altogether: an impenitent faith, and an unbelieving penitence, will leave us in no better state than that of devils, of whom St. James says, that "they believe and tremble[n]." Let us then cultivate these dispositions to our dying hour; and look unto Jesus with penitential faith, and with believing penitence.]

[l] 1 John v. 6. [m] Heb. vi. 6. [n] Jam. ii. 19.

OUTLINE NO. 1728

THE BURIAL OF JESUS.

John xix. 38—42. *And after this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.*

THE smallest circumstances relative to the life and death of our blessed Lord may well be supposed to deserve peculiar attention: but the mere interment of his body one would imagine might be passed over as a matter of no moment. Yet we find our Lord himself repeatedly referring to it, during the course of his ministry. He mentions the indispensable necessity of his interment, in order to complete the purposes of his grace[a]: he specifies the term of his intended continuance in the heart of the earth[b]: and he commends the fervent love of Mary in pouring ointment on his head, as a prophetic, though not an intended, preparation for his burial[c]. In fact, the inspired history does not record any thing more minutely and circumstantially than the funeral of our Lord: and the more carefully we attend to what is spoken respecting it, the more interesting and instructive it will appear. Let us consider then,

I. The peculiar circumstances of his interment—

[In the moment when our Lord seemed abandoned by all, except a few women and his beloved Disciple, and when, as it should appear, no motive could any longer exist for shewing a regard for him, God raised up two persons of eminence and distinction to pay that respect to him when dead, which had been refused to him when living. One of these persons

[a] John xii. 24. [b] Matt. xii. 40. [c] Matt. xxvi. 12.

is very particularly described: the different Evangelists being consulted, we learn *his name and place of abode:* he was "Joseph of Arimathea," or Ramah, in the tribe of Ephraim, the birth-place and residence of Samuel. Next, we have *his rank and condition:* he was "a rich man, and an honourable counsellor," one of the Jewish Sanhedrim. Further, we are informed of *his character and conduct:* he was "a just and good man," who, when the Sanhedrim had condemned our Lord as guilty of death, "had not consented to the counsel and deed of them." Lastly, mention is made of *his principles and attainments:* he was "a Disciple of Christ," who even then, when the Apostles had lost all thought that Christ's kingdom should ever be established, actually "waited for the kingdom of God," in expectation that it should yet appear[d]. This person went in "boldly" to Pilate, and begged to have the body of Jesus at his disposal. This conduct of his manifested a considerable degree of fortitude: for it could not but be very offensive to the rest of the Jewish council to see one of their own body paying funeral honours to one, whom, but a few hours before, they had condemned and crucified as a malefactor: besides, if Jesus should rise again according to the expectations that had been formed, he would infallibly be accused as a confederate with the other Disciples, and as having assisted them in stealing away the corpse from the tomb. Pilate, not believing that Jesus was so soon dead, sent for the centurion who superintended the execution, to inquire respecting it: and, on being assured by him that he was really dead, and that, subsequent to his death, he had been stabbed to the heart with a spear, he gave his consent. Joseph therefore went and took down the body, and wrapped it in some fine linen which he had bought for the purpose. But in this he was assisted by another person of eminence, Nicodemus by name, "the same man who, three years before, had come to Jesus by night," to inquire into his doctrine; and who on one occasion had befriended him before the Jewish council, by stating, that the Jewish law did not admit of any person being condemned till after an opportunity of vindicating his own innocence had been afforded him[e]. This man "bought a large quantity of myrrh and aloes, and other spices, about an hundred pound weight;" and, together with Joseph, wrapped up the dead body in it for the present, intending, probably after the sabbath, to embalm it with greater care.

Joseph, after the custom of the Jews, had provided for himself a new tomb, hewn out of a rock: and, it being near to the

[d] Compare Matt. xxvii. 57—60. Mark xv. 42—46. and Luke xxiii. 50—53. with the text.

[e] John vii. 50—52.

place where Jesus was crucified, he deposited the body there: and, for the sake of decency and security, rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre.

Such is the account given us of the burial of our Lord: and at first sight perhaps it may appear, if not uninteresting, at least destitute of any important instruction. But we shall not be of this opinion, if we duly weigh, as we propose to do,]

II. The practical benefits resulting from it—

There is not a single circumstance in this account which is not very important; and the whole taken together is of singular USE,

1. To establish our faith—

[Two things are necessary to be ascertained, before we can have just grounds for our faith in Christ; namely, first, *the truth of the facts* recorded concerning him; and next, *the agreement of those facts with the prophecies* of the Old Testament. Now the main facts to be ascertained, are, the death and the resurrection of Jesus: for, if he did not die, he has made no atonement for our sins; and, if he did not rise again, we have no evidence that his atonement has been accepted in our behalf. But behold how these facts are contained in the history before us! Pilate had doubts respecting the death of Jesus; and would not consent to Joseph's request, till the point was ascertained from the very person whom he had appointed to superintend the execution. Had there been a spark of life in the body, the enemies of Jesus would not have given it into the possession of his friends; nor would his friends have consigned it to the tomb. His death therefore was proved beyond a doubt; nor was the truth of his resurrection less clearly manifested: for the tomb was new; and we are repeatedly told, that no corpse had ever yet been laid in it. Had there been any other corpse there, the resurrection of Jesus might have been ascribed to that; as the restoration of a dead body to life was effected by its being brought in contact with the bones of the Prophet Elisha[f]: or it might have been affirmed, that it was the other corpse, and not that of Jesus, that revived. But, when there never had been any other corpse deposited there, the resurrection of Jesus could not be confounded with that of any other person; nor could it be ascribed to any other power than his own. Moreover, the sepulchre being hewn out of a solid rock, was inaccessible, except at that entrance which was stopped by the stone, and guarded by the band of soldiers: had it been accessible in any other way, there might have been some plausibility in the story that the corpse

[f] 2 Kings xiii. 21.

was stolen from it by the Disciples; but the very nature of the grave precluded a possibility of removing the body from it, without the knowledge of the Roman guard.

Thus far then *the facts* are clear: and now mark *their correspondence with the voice of prophecy.* It had been expressly foretold, that, though Christ should be "numbered with transgressors," and have "his grave appointed with the wicked; yet *with the rich should be his tomb*[g]." This was as improbable as any event that could be conceived: the order was the same in relation to him as to the other malefactors, that his bones should be broken, and that he should be dealt with precisely in the way that the others were: yet behold, at the very instant when this prophecy appeared to have failed, God put it into the heart of "a *rich* man," already provided with a tomb, near to the very place, to ask permission to inter the body, and actually to inter it in his own tomb! Surely, if the minute accomplishment of prophecy in the person of the Lord Jesus were duly considered, it would not be possible for any human being, whether Jew or Gentile, to entertain a doubt respecting the truth of his Messiahship: yet is this but one point of a hundred whereon our faith rests, and whereby it may be established.]

2. To confirm our hope—

[Many are the prophecies relating to the Church at large, and the promises relating to every individual believer, which yet remain to be accomplished, and for the accomplishment of which no visible means exist. Look at the state of the world, and see, how impracticable, humanly speaking, the idea is, of forming the whole race of mankind into one great society, who shall all acknowledge the Lord Jesus as their Supreme Head, and trust in him as their only Saviour, and serve him with their whole hearts, and enjoy and glorify him with their whole souls. Or look at any individual believer, and see his manifold corruptions, his innumerable temptations, his potent enemies: how can we conceive that he shall ever attain the Divine image, and triumph over all the powers of earth and hell? Yet we may see in the history before us, that God will never want means to effect his gracious purposes. He that raised up a Moses in the very court of Pharaoh, to deliver his people from Egyptian bondage; and foretold Cyrus even by name, three hundred years before he was born, as the destined Restorer of his people from their captivity in Babylon; and raised up Esther, in so astonishing a way, in the house of Ahasuerus, to save the whole Jewish nation from destruction; may safely be trusted to accomplish his own purposes in his

[g] See Isai. liii. 9. Bishop Lowth's translation.

own time and way. We have no occasion to inquire, *How* shall he do this or that? it is quite sufficient that he has promised: and it is our privilege to know, that "what he has promised he is able also to perform;" and that of all the good things which he has authorized us to expect, "not one shall ever fail[h]" — — —]

3. To enlarge our charity—

[We are too apt to judge of things according as they appear to us, without considering how limited our views are, and how incompetent we are to judge aright. If we see not many who openly acknowledge God, we are ready to think the number of his worshippers much fewer than they really are. The Prophet Elijah erred in this respect: he thought that he stood alone in Israel, and that all besides himself were idolaters; whereas God informed him that there were no less than seven thousand men in Israel who had not bowed their knee to the image of Baal. And we, if we had lived at the time of our Lord's crucifixion, should have concluded, that amongst the great council of the Jewish nation, who condemned him to death, there was not one who was not a decided enemy of the Lord Jesus. But the history shews, that there were two persons of great eminence amongst them, who were truly pious, though they had been restrained by fear from making a public profession of their sentiments. We must not be understood as intending to justify or excuse the fear of man; for it is certainly a great and heinous sin; and a man who is ashamed of Christ, and denies Christ now, has reason to fear that Christ will be ashamed of him, and deny him at the last day: but still it is comfortable to think that God has many "hidden ones" even amongst his most inveterate enemies, and many who will perhaps come forth at a future period with more "boldness," and to more effect, than others who have made an open profession of his truth. I say again, We mean not to extenuate the guilt of cowardice; but still it is a fact, that many persons, whose cowardice we deplore, have opportunities of rendering services to God which they could never have rendered, if their profession of religion had been more avowed: and therefore, whilst we lament the weakness of the religious principle within them, we must neither judge them too severely, nor undervalue their real worth. We must make just allowance for those who are in high official stations, whose difficulties are thereby greatly increased. We must not despise the day of small things; but must rather bear with the infirmities of the weak; and rejoice in the hope, that they who are yet but "babes in Christ," will, in God's time, become men and warriors, and "valiant for the truth." Many,

[h] See Josh. xxiii. 14.

like Paul, are training in the ranks of Christ's enemies, who shall one day come forth as champions to fight and conquer in his cause.]

4. To reconcile us to the thoughts of death—

[Death is universally regarded as "the king of terrors." Our nature revolts at the idea of being committed to the tomb. But why should we shudder at it, when we see the Lord of life and glory going down into the heart of the earth? Surely he has perfumed and sanctified the grave: and we may well be satisfied to be conformed to him in his death, when we have the blessed prospect of resembling him also in his resurrection. He indeed "saw no corruption" there; whereas we shall be devoured by worms, and return to our native dust: but then this will be only for a time; for we shall surely at the last day be raised again, and "that which was sown in weakness, dishonour, and corruption, shall be raised in incorruption, power, and glory:" yes, "this mortal body shall be fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body," and, together with our souls, be made partaker of everlasting felicity. All that we have to be concerned about, is, to be ready for the change; to seek an interest in that adorable Saviour who died for us, and to get an experimental "knowledge of him in the power of his resurrection," that, "being rendered conformable to his death, we may by any means attain the resurrection of the dead[i]."

We condemn not the respect shewn to departed friends, when we consign them to the grave. The pomp and splendour indeed of some funerals are an insult, rather than an honour, to the putrefying remains of one who is paying the penalty of sin: but a modest respect is due to that, which lately was a temple of the living God, and which shall ere long be restored, in perfect purity, to the full enjoyment of his presence. Yet we need not be solicitous about this: let us only be anxious, whether for ourselves or others, to "fall asleep in Jesus;" and then, whether honoured or not in our funeral rites, we shall be raised, through him, to endless felicity and glory.]

[i] Phil. iii. 10, 11.

OUTLINE NO. 1729

CHARACTER OF NICODEMUS.

John xix. 39. *There came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night.*

IT is generally supposed, that by conversion a man's character is altogether changed. But this is by no means true. Divine grace gives a new direction

to a man's natural powers; but it does not divest him of them, so that he shall altogether cease to be the same as he was before. His moral dispositions, so far as they were evil, will be corrected; and, so far as they were good, will be improved: but the natural temperament of his mind will remain in a great measure the same as it was in his unconverted state, only under the controul of a higher and better principle. For instance, a bold and confident Peter will carry into his religious profession the same boldness and precipitancy which characterized him as a natural man: and, for the most part, a man's besetting sins (due allowance being made for a change of age and circumstances) will prove his besetting sins even to his dying hour. In *conduct*, the lion will become a lamb; but the *disposition* of courage or timidity will still adhere to each, according to his natural bias. Yet sometimes these matters shall be reversed, as we see in the history before us. At the period of our Lord's lowest extremity, when he hanged dead upon the cross, a cowardly Nicodemus united with another no less timid than himself, Joseph of Arimathea, to honour the Saviour, whom the intrepid Peter had forsaken, and denied even with oaths and curses.

To cast further light upon this subject, I shall,

I. Consider the character of Nicodemus—

He was a man of very considerable distinction, at the time of our Lord's death. In his religious profession he was a Pharisee; in his civil station he was a member of the great council of the nation, and a ruler and teacher in a synagogue; and in the habit of his mind, a candid and honest man. Having heard of the miracles which the Lord Jesus had wrought, he concluded, that a person endued with such powers must necessarily have come from God, and, consequently, must have much religious information to impart. He determined, therefore, to obtain an interview with Jesus, and learn from him whatever he was commissioned to reveal. And, when he went to Jesus, he, though possessed of such rank and

authority himself, addressed that despised and persecuted Teacher by the respectful appellation of "Rabbi;" confessing his belief in him as a Teacher sent from God. Thus far all was well. But there were in Nicodemus two great defects, to which I must now call your attention:

1. His cowardice—

[Twice is Nicodemus mentioned after that interview; and both times is he stigmatized as the person that "went to Jesus by night[a]." In this he acted most unworthily. As a man of probity, he should not have been ashamed of doing what was right, or afraid of any censure he might incur by following the dictates of his own conscience. What have we to do with man's opinion? We should approve ourselves to God, without so much as thinking, and much less fearing, what man may either say or do. It is the happiness of the Christian that he has none to fear, but God. But, wherever Christ comes in the ministration of the word, there are too many who are like-minded with Nicodemus; and are kept from seeking instruction for their souls, through "that fear of man which bringeth a snare." Many will not even go so far as he. They have an inward conviction that this or that minister is really sent of God, and has most valuable information to impart; and yet they neither dare to hear him in public, nor to visit him in private, lest it should be known that they are inquiring after truth. Sad enemies are these to their own welfare, whilst they deprive themselves of opportunities which God has afforded them for the instruction and salvation of their souls! They may avoid the censure of men; but they have a stigma fixed upon them by God; and they have reason to fear that that Saviour, "whom they thus deny before men, will deny them before his Father and his holy angels[b]."]

2. His unbelief—

[Our blessed Lord, instead of reproaching him for his cowardice, immediately opened to him that doctrine which he most needed to hear, and which was of most immediate importance to one of his caste and complexion. Being himself a teacher of religion, and of that sect which was highest in repute for sanctity, he would of course think that he needed only some particular instruction which Jesus might have been commissioned to impart. But our blessed Lord told him, and with the strongest asseverations assured him, that he needed altogether a new birth; and that, without being born both of

[a] Compare John vii. 50. [b] Mark viii. 38.

water and of the Spirit, he could neither see nor enter into the kingdom of God. *This*, it might have been expected, Nicodemus should be well acquainted with: for the prophets, with whose writings he was so conversant, had most distinctly affirmed it[c] — — — But Nicodemus could not at all comprehend such mysterious truths: he foolishly thought that our Lord must refer to some natural birth which his followers were to experience; and when our Lord explained himself more fully by a comparison which was familiar to all, and told him plainly that it was a *spiritual* birth that he spoke of, he still remained as ignorant as ever; saying, "How can these things be?" Hence our Lord reproved his *unbelief;* saying, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things[d]?"

Thus it frequently is found amongst ourselves. Frequently do we see persons who are most exemplary in their morals and most intelligent in their minds, and, on the whole, of candid dispositions too, yet stumbling at the truths of the Gospel, and "unable to comprehend them, for want of a spiritual discernment[e]." And so it must ever be, when men "mix not faith with the word they hear[f]."]

Having seen the character of Nicodemus, let us,

II. Make some remarks upon it—

This subject would open to us a very wide field for observation; but I content myself with observing, that in Nicodemus we see,

1. The power of the world in opposition to truth—

[It is clear that the words of our blessed Lord had made a lodgment both in the mind and in the heart of this timid man; and yet he did not dare to follow up his convictions. At no great distance of time, when the council was condemning Jesus unheard, Nicodemus ventured to express an opinion that such conduct was both ungenerous and unjust: "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth[g]?" But for three years after this we hear no more of Nicodemus. No more does he seek to be instructed by our Lord, either in public or in private. The general voice was against our Saviour; and Nicodemus dared not to encounter the reproach that would be cast upon him, if he should be known to be, even in heart, a follower of the despised Nazarene. Who would have thought that "a ruler in Israel" should be so timid? But the fact is, that the more elevated any man is, the more

[c] Jer. xxxi. 32, 33. Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26. [d] John iii. 12.
[e] 1 Cor. ii. 14. [f] Heb. iv. 2. [g] John vii. 51.

fearful he is of subjecting himself to public observation and reproach. In St. Paul's day it was thus. He appealed to the whole Church of Corinth: "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called[h]." And so it is in every age: let a man possess any distinction in society, and, instead of being emboldened by it to act according to his conscience, he is intimidated and restrained, and scarcely dares, even in private, to associate with one who is an avowed follower of Christ. In vain is it said that "the fearful shall not inherit the kingdom of God[i];" and that, "if we deny Christ, he also will deny us[k]." So great is the power of a vain ungodly world, that we will please them rather than God; and, for fear of their censure, expose ourselves to the wrath of an offended God.]

2. The power of truth in opposition to the world—

[The seed, which had been sown in Nicodemus's heart, "grew up, he knew not how[l];" and, in an hour when, according to all human calculations, we should have least expected it to shew itself, it sprang up, and brought forth fruit, to the honour of our blessed Lord. The Lord Jesus was now dead upon the cross; and to pay him any honour was at the peril of a person's life. Yet then, when Christ's own Disciples had forsaken him, Nicodemus, with "Joseph, who also had been a disciple, but secretly for fear of the Jews[m]," "went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus," in order that they might inter it with such a measure of honour and respect as the present circumstances would admit of. The boldness of this petition is particularly noticed by St. Mark[n]: but truth, if allowed to have its proper influence, will embolden any man, and make him to disregard even life itself, if duty call for the surrender of it[o]. On this occasion the force of truth appears particularly conspicuous, when it animated two such timid persons to so perilous an adventure, to which they had not been called, and which they might have declined without the slightest imputation on their character. Let but truth erect its throne within the heart, and every adverse power it will utterly subdue[p].]

What, then, is my ADVICE in relation to this matter?

1. Let us not covet the distinctions of this life—

[There is an idea prevalent amongst men, that the higher we rise in society, the greater will be our influence, especially if we stand well with the world, as not being "righteous overmuch." Now, I will grant that persons of this description

[h] 1 Cor. i. 26. [i] Rev. xxi. 8. [k] 2 Tim. ii. 12.
[l] Mark iv. 27. [m] ver. 38. [n] Mark xv. 43.
[o] Acts xx. 24. [p] John viii. 32.

can often do things which more decided characters would be unable to effect. I think it highly probable, that not all the Disciples together could have prevailed on Pilate to give *them* the body of Jesus; nor would the chief priests have suffered even Joseph and Nicodemus to have the body, if they had been generally known as followers of Christ. But the man that will draw back from Christ, and conform to the world with any such expectation as this, little thinks to what peril he subjects his own soul, and what a stigma will be fixed upon him by Almighty God, even if he should find mercy at his hands in the last day. Beloved brethren, know this, that "ye cannot serve God and mammon too[q]." "If ye will be friends of the world, ye must be the enemies of God[r]," and be dealt with as enemies in the eternal world. I mean not to discourage *exertion* in the pursuit either of wealth or science: but an *ambitious coveting* of distinction I must declare to be utterly inconsistent with true piety. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world: if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him[s]." I can have little doubt, but that if Joseph and Nicodemus had been in a lower sphere of life, they would have earlier confessed our blessed Lord. It was their elevation that kept them back: for lofty mountains are usually barren, in comparison of the lowly valleys. And you likewise may have reason to curse the day that ever you were raised to spheres of eminence and distinction. Be content, then, with the sphere in which it has pleased God to place you. If only you reflect, that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven," you will see the wisdom of that advice, "Seekest thou great things unto thyself? Seek them not[t]."]

2. Let us follow the dictates of our own conscience—

[How lamentable was it, that Nicodemus, for the space of three years, should suppress, instead of following, the voice of God within him. Were he now to return from heaven, and sojourn here again, what shame would he take to himself for such unworthy conduct! Beloved brethren, let us serve God, and him only, even though all around us should depart from him[u]. Let us, like Caleb and Joshua, "follow the Lord fully[x]." Who does not admire Elijah, when he stood alone, as he thought, in the midst of all Israel? Thus let us do. "If the Lord be God, let us follow him," in despite both of men and devils.]

[q] Matt. vi. 24. [r] Jam. iv. 4. [s] 1 John ii. 15, 16.
[t] Jer. xlv. 5. [u] Josh. xxiv. 15. [x] Numb. xiv. 24.

3. Let us, whatever talents we possess, improve them for the Lord—

[Doubtless Joseph and Nicodemus felt, that on this occasion they could exert an influence which others did not possess: and they did well, in improving it for the Lord. Now, all of us, in our respective situations, have influence of some kind: and, whatever it be, let us use it diligently, for the honour of our God. There are times and seasons which we should seize; lest, by delay, they pass away, and our opportunity for serving God be lost for ever. Had Esther not promptly followed the advice of Mordecai, in going, at the peril of her life, to Ahasuerus, the whole nation of the Jews had perished. She was the only person that, humanly speaking, could interpose with effect: and God signally blessed her pious exertions. Let us, also, watch the calls of Providence, and every one of us, according to our ability, discharge the duties that lie before us. And, if a momentary fear arise in our hearts, let us, with Moses, "esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt[y];" and, with the Apostle Paul, account martyrdom itself a ground of self-congratulation and of holy joy[z].]

[y] Heb. xi. 26. [z] Phil. ii. 17.

OUTLINE NO. 1730

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

John xx. 8, 9. *Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.*

ON this day was fulfilled that prophecy, which is so often quoted in the New Testament, "The stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner." Yes, "this is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it[a]." It is true, the arrival of it in the first instance afforded no satisfaction either to the friends or enemies of our Lord. The earthquake that attended his resurrection filled the soldiers with consternation and dismay; insomuch that, when they saw "the angel who rolled away the stone from his sepulchre, they

[a] Ps. cxviii. 22—24.

shook, and became as dead men:" and all the heads of the Jewish nation, when they saw how ineffectual their precautions had been, were mad with disappointment. The Disciples too were overwhelmed with grief: they had been taught to expect the resurrection of their Lord; yet they seemed to have really less expectation of it than his very enemies; so wholly were they absorbed in grief, and given up to despondency. At last, however, their sorrow was turned into joy; and they were constrained to believe, when they found it no longer possible to doubt.

We will endeavour to shew,

I. The reason of their unbelief—

Our text informs us, that "they knew not the Scripture"—

[Our Lord had often told them, that "he must be killed, and on the third day rise again." He had spoken of it figuratively[b]; he had declared it plainly[c]; he had laid the whole stress of his religion upon it[d]: and his very enemies considered that on this point depended either the proof of his Messiahship, or a decisive evidence of his imposture[e]. But his Disciples never understood him[f]: one of them had even presumed "to rebuke him," as though to talk of his death and resurrection was the result of needless fear or gloomy superstition[g]. Thus, for want of considering what the Holy Scriptures, and their Lord, had spoken on this subject, they could not conceive that such an event as his resurrection should ever take place.]

To the same source must be traced the unbelief that generally prevails—

[The Scriptures speak plainly respecting our undone state by nature, and our recovery through Christ alone — — — But when we declare these things to men, they are ready to reply, "Doth he not speak parables[h]?"— — —"They know not the Scripture;" they do not understand it; they do not regard it; they form their own opinions without any reference to it; and therefore they neither will, nor can, receive its decisions — — —]

But as their unbelief was at last vanquished, we proceed to inquire into,

[b] John ii. 19, 21. [c] Matt. xx. 19. [d] Matt. xii. 39, 40.
[e] Matt. xxvii. 63, 64. [f] Mark ix. 9, 10, 31, 32.
[g] Matt. xvi. 21, 22. [h] Ezek. xx. 49.

II. The means by which it was overcome—

The Apostles diligently investigated the subject proposed to them—

[They were informed by Mary Magdalen, that the body of our Lord was removed from the sepulchre. Without loss of time they set out, as expeditiously as possible, to investigate the point. John being the younger man, and not, like Peter, oppressed with a load of guilt, arrived first at the place, and *looked* into the sepulchre: but Peter, being the more intrepid character, as soon as he arrived, *went* directly, and without hesitation, *into* the sepulchre, and saw the careful manner in which the linen and the napkin were folded up and laid in separate places, evidently showing that the body had not been taken away, nor had escaped but with the utmost calmness and composure. John, emboldened by his example, used the same means of ascertaining the fact; and, on discovering it, "believed" that Christ was indeed risen; whilst Peter, though "wondering at the things that had come to pass," still retained some doubts respecting them. Still, however, the measure of conviction which was wrought in both their minds, was produced by the same means: but it was strongest on him, whose mind was most under the influence of love.]

In a similar way must all unbelief be vanquished—

[We must search and examine for ourselves: we must also vie with each other, as it were, in the pursuit of truth, animating and encouraging one another both by *testimony* and *example* — — — To such diligent and candid exertions is the faith of the Beræans ascribed[i]: and wherever they are used, with prayer to God for the illumination of his Spirit, they will sooner or later assuredly succeed — — —]

From the circumstance of their not yielding an easy assent to what was told them, we shall be led to notice,

III. The grounds which are hereby afforded for our faith—

The Apostles were very slow to believe the fact of Christ's resurrection—

[They would not believe the woman that had seen a vision[k]: nor even when Mary had had a personal interview with him, would they believe[l]; nor even when two of their own body had conversed with him[m]. They would scarcely

[i] Acts xvii. 11, 12.
[k] Luke xxiv. 4—11.
[l] Mark xvi. 9—11.
[m] Mark xvi. 12, 13.

believe the evidence of their own senses[n]. Nor, when all the others had been overpowered with the weight of evidence, would Thomas yield assent, till, by feeling the very wounds which had been made in the hands and side of Christ, he had a testimony which he could no longer doubt[o].]

But all this tends exceedingly to confirm our faith—

[Had the Disciples yielded an easy assent, their report had been the less worthy of credit: but when they were so incredulous, as to bring on themselves a severe rebuke from Christ for "their unbelief and hardness of heart[p]," their testimony may be relied upon; because they asserted nothing which they had not ascertained to be true by evidence the most solid and incontrovertible. In *this view* their word may be implicitly received: but when, *in addition to all this*, their testimony was confirmed by the visible descent of the Holy Ghost, and by miracles without number, and, lastly, by their willingness at all times to seal it with their blood, there can be no room to entertain a doubt respecting it; nor can any testimony whatever be worthy of the smallest credit, if theirs be not considered as beyond the reach of doubt.]

Assuming then the doctrine of Christ's resurrection as proved, let us CONTEMPLATE,

1. The benefits dependent on it—

[Every part of our salvation depends on this, even more than on his death itself[q] — — — — O learn to see this, as the Apostles, when fully instructed, saw it! and rejoice in seeing every thing secured to you both for time and eternity[r] — — — —]

2. The duties arising from it—

[Your great duty is, to be conformed to his resurrection; dying *to* sin, as he died for it, and living *to* God, even as he does — — — All the affections of your soul must follow him[s]; and the renovation of your life correspond in all things with the pattern which his resurrection exhibits to your view — — — Remember however to look to him for strength; for "without him you can do nothing," but "through his strength you can do all things" — — — —]

[n] Luke xxiv. 36—41. [o] John xx. 24—27. [p] Mark xvi. 14.
[q] Rom. viii. 34. "*rather*;" and Rom. iv. 25. and v. 10.
[r] Col. iii. 3, 4. [s] Col. iii. 1, 2.

OUTLINE NO. 1731

INSPIRATION AND AUTHORITY OF THE APOSTLES.

John xx. 21—23. *Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so I send you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.*

IT is not easy to conceive what disappointment our Lord's Disciples must have felt, when they found that he was dead upon the cross, and committed to the silent tomb. "They had expected that he was the person who should redeem Israel:" and the wonderful works which he had done, had appeared to justify that expectation[a]: but, behold, his enemies had prevailed against him, and the hopes which they had entertained were altogether frustrated. But our blessed Lord left them not long in this disconsolate condition. He soon gave them evidences that he was risen from the dead. To some he appeared on the morning of his resurrection: and "in the evening of that day" he came to them all, whilst they were assembled, with closed doors, for fear of the Jews; and both spake peace to their troubled minds, and renewed to them the commission which he had given them to preach his Gospel to the world; enduing them, at the same time, with a more abundant measure of qualifications for their ministry than he had hitherto conferred; and assuring them, that all which they either said, or did, on earth, under the influence of his good Spirit, should be confirmed and ratified in heaven.

Interested as we are in the office which was here assigned them, it will be well for us to ascertain, with some precision,

I. The measure of inspiration given them—

The commission which the Apostles now received

[a] Luke xxiv. 19—21.

from Christ resembled that which Christ himself had received from the Father—

[Christ was furnished by the Father for the office that was assigned him. "The Spirit of the Lord God was upon him[b]," yea, and "was given to him without measure[c]." "The Spirit of the Lord rested upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, and made him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord[d]." At the time of his baptism, the Holy Spirit was sent down in a visible manner, both to attest his mission, and to qualify him for it[e]. And this was the way chosen by God for manifesting to the world the commission given to the Apostles, and for imparting to them, at the same time, the qualifications necessary for the discharge of their high office.]

On them the Lord Jesus poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit, to fit and qualify them for their work—

[His "breathing on them" was merely an emblematic sign, to shew them that he was empowered to communicate the Holy Spirit to whomsoever he would. He had before told them, that "he would send unto them the Holy Spirit from the Father[f]:" and he now imparted to them that heavenly gift; and assured them, that, within the space of a few days, they should be baptized with the Holy Ghost[g]," and receive him in that abundant measure which would be necessary for the perfect execution of the various duties to which they would be called.

But there was, doubtless, an infinite disparity between our Lord and his Disciples, both as to the measure of inspiration with which they were endued, and as to the perfection of holiness which they possessed. The knowledge of our blessed Saviour was co-extensive with the knowledge of his heavenly Father[h]; and *in him* was not the smallest possible imperfection[i]: but *they* were still weak and sinful, and liable to err, except when under the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit. In *acting*, we know, in the instance of St. Peter, how fallible they were: and in *recording* what they had been commissioned to declare, they were left to themselves, to use their own language, and to report what they knew: they were indeed assisted by the Holy Spirit, who "brought all things to their remembrance;" and by the Spirit they were instructed in things which they could not otherwise have known: and by the same Spirit they

[b] Isai. lxi. 1. [c] John iii. 34. [d] Isai. xi. 2, 3.
[e] Matt. iii. 16, 17. [f] John xv. 26. and xvi. 7.
[g] Acts i. 5. [h] John. v. 20. x. 15. and xvi. 30.
[i] Heb. vii. 26.

were kept from error of every kind: so that all which they have spoken must be regarded as the word of God, no less than if their very words had been dictated from above: for though, I say again, they were left to record every thing in their own language, yet, in all that they stated, and in all that they revealed, they were kept from error of every kind and every degree. If, on some occasions, they delivered any thing from their own minds, as matters of opinion, and not as divine authority, they failed not to inform the reader in what light he was to regard that particular sentiment which was so delivered[k]: but in all other matters they claimed the authority of God himself, as sanctioning and confirming all that they uttered in his name[l].]

This will yet more fully appear, whilst we consider,

II. The authority committed to them—

The words in which this authority was conveyed have been grievously misinterpreted and perverted—

[The ministers of the Church of Rome found on this, and other similar passages of Holy Writ, a claim to the power of forgiving sins. When, indeed, they are accused of this, they will deny it, and will endeavour to explain away their arrogant assertions. But it is a fact, that they teach their people to conceive of them as possessing this power: and their people do entertain this opinion, and do look to them to exercise this power; and do submit to their unscriptural impositions, under this fallacious hope; aye, and do pay them, too, for administering to them this indulgence. This power, say they, was given to St. Peter[m]; and therefore the Pope, as the successor of St. Peter, possesses it. This power too, say they, was given to the Church; and therefore they, as constituting the Church, possess it[n]. And again: this power was given to all the Apostles; and therefore they, as descendants of the Apostles, possess it[o]. But when did Peter ever exercise this power? Did he, when he first preached to the Jews? When, under great agony of mind, they cried, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" did he say, "I, I Peter, forgive you?" No: he assumed no such power to himself; but said, "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins[p]." Did he arrogate to himself any such power, when he opened the kingdom of heaven to the Gentiles? No: when they would have been ready enough to yield him even divine honours, he forbad them[q]; and, in-

[k] 1 Cor. vii. 6, 10, 25, 40.
[l] 1 Thess. ii. 13. and iv. 8.
[m] Matt. xvi. 19.
[n] Matt. xviii. 18.
[o] The text.
[p] Acts ii. 37, 38.
[q] Acts x. 25, 26.

stead of saying "I forgive you," he referred Cornelius and his company to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only source of hope and peace; saying, "To HIM give all the prophets witness, that, through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins[r]." When our blessed Lord himself forgave sins, the surrounding Jews, conceiving of him as a mere man, accused him of blasphemy. And their accusation was just, if he was not God; for, "who can forgive sins, but God only[s]?"]

What, then, is the true import of the passage?

[The authority vested in the Apostles was not personal, but official; or rather, I should say, did not exist at all in themselves, but only as declaring the character of those whom God would accept or reject in the day of judgment. So far as this power was exercised in inflicting or removing censures from any members of the Church, it had relation only to this world. So far as it related to the eternal world, it was altogether declarative, and in no respect judicial. It accorded exactly with the authority of the priests under the law, when they were called upon to judge respecting lepers: there were given marks, whereby they were to try every case that came before them: where those marks were found, they pronounced the person leprous: and where they were not found, they absolved him from the charge of leprosy[t]. So the Apostles have laid down, with the utmost clearness, the marks whereby a child of God may be discerned, and be distinguished from an hypocritical professor: and according to what they have declared shall every case be decided in the day of judgment: those whom they have pronounced forgiven, shall be forgiven; and those to whom they have assigned a sentence of condemnation, shall assuredly be condemned. This was the power which they exercised: and this power still resides in those who, as God's ambassadors, are authorised by him to declare his will to men. So far as they judge according to the written word, the sins of men, as remitted or retained by them, shall be remitted or retained in heaven.]

That we may bring this subject home for more general use, I would call you to NOTICE from it,

1. What aid is reserved for you in the discharge of your duties—

[You need, in your respective callings, the influence of the Holy Spirit, as much as ever the Apostles did. And to you shall it be given, as freely as ever it was conferred on them — — — The Lord Jesus Christ has "the residue of the

[r] Acts x. 43. [s] Mark ii. 7. [t] Lev. xiii. 38—46.

Spirit" still abiding in him[u]: and if you pray, "Lord Jesus, breathe on me!" he will in no wise refuse your request[x].]

2. How to judge of your state before God—

[Men will pretend to declare, with great confidence, that such and such characters, which *they* account good, have nothing to fear. You yourselves, too, may have formed a strong opinion on such points. But I warn you, that whatever you or the world may think, God's judgment shall stand; and his final sentence shall be in exact accordance with his written word. Your one inquiry therefore must be, "What saith the Scripture?" for assuredly those whom the Scripture acquits, shall be acquitted; and those whom the Scripture condemns, shall be condemned. "To the word, therefore, and to the testimony. Whoever they be that speak not according to this word, there is no light in them."]

[u] Mal. ii. 15. [x] Luke xi. 13.

OUTLINE NO. 1732

THOMAS'S UNBELIEF REPROVED.

John xx. 27, 28. *Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.*

IT is worthy of observation, that the inspired writers shew no solicitude to conceal their own faults, or the faults of each other; but that they relate every thing with artless simplicity, precisely as it occurred. The Disciples were all, without exception, reproved as "fools, and slow of heart to believe what had been written by the prophets" of old. But Thomas in particular gave way to unbelief, and would not credit the resurrection of his Lord, even after all the others were convinced of it. This, however, was overruled by his Divine Master, for the good of the Church in all ages: for, whilst it was an occasion of a particular manifestation of Christ to him, it brought forth from him as glorious a confession of Christ, as any we find in the inspired volume.

From that manifestation, and that confession, we shall be led to shew,

I. The evidence we have of the truth of Christianity—

Of course we cannot enter now into the consideration of the evidences at large: we must confine our attention to the two which are mentioned in the passage before us;

1. The testimony of the Apostles in general—

[They had no expectation that their Lord and Master would rise again: and when they were informed that he was risen, they knew not how to believe it. However, the numerous proofs which they had of it on the very day on which he rose, and particularly his presence with them all on the close of that day, convinced them fully that he was indeed risen, and that the same body which had been crucified was restored to life[a]. From that time they entertained no doubt respecting this fundamental article of their faith. On the contrary, as soon as ever the Holy Ghost had descended on them on the day of Pentecost, they spake of it with great boldness, and urged it as a decisive proof that Jesus was the true Messiah. In this testimony they all concurred; nor could the most cruel menaces or persecutions at all abate their confidence in maintaining it. Having themselves had such abundant opportunities of ascertaining the truth of his resurrection during the forty days that he continued upon earth, they were ready to seal their testimony with their own blood, and did actually lay down their lives in confirmation of it. To this conduct they had no temptation whatever; for they knew that nothing but trials and persecutions, imprisonments and death, would be their portion in this world. With what confidence they themselves relied upon this truth, may be seen from their writings[b]: and, if we receive not their testimony, there must be an end of all testimony whatever; since nothing ever was, or can be, so incontrovertibly established, as this fact.]

2. The testimony of Thomas in particular—

[His doubts might seem to justify a suspicion of the veracity, or at least of the judgment, of all the other Apostles: but it rather adds weight to their testimony; since it shews his absolute determination never to acknowledge that fact to have taken place, till it should be proved to him by such evidence as it would be impossible to withstand. Indeed the proof which he required was most unreasonable; for, if our Lord was to submit his wounds to be inspected by all mankind, in order to gain their assent to the truth of his resurrection, he must never go up to heaven at all, but continue on earth to the very

[a] Luke xxiv. 39, 40.
[b] Acts i. 3. and x. 41. 1 Cor. xv. 3—8. 1 John i. 1—3.

end of the world, in order that every person in every successive generation might have the evidence here required. For, if Thomas could not credit the other Apostles who had touched and handled their Lord's body, why should he expect others to credit *him?* And why should not every one to the end of time demand for himself the same evidence that *he* did? But our Lord was pleased to gratify his unreasonable desire; and by thus extorting from him an acknowledgment of his resurrection, he has given to the world such a proof of it as incredulity itself can now no longer withstand.]

Thomas, overcome by this evidence, shews in his acknowledgment,

II. The faith it should produce in us—

It is not an assent to the mere fact of Christ's resurrection that is required of us, but,

1. An assent to all those truths which the resurrection of Christ was intended to confirm—

[Our Lord referred men to his resurrection as the proof of his Messiahship, and as the evidence that the religion which he established was of God. Accordingly, we must consider every word of Christ as confirmed beyond all doubt, the very moment we acknowledge the truth of his resurrection. *The divinity of his person,* as "Emmanuel, God with us;" *the nature of his death,* as "a propitiation for the sins of the whole world;" *the certainty of acceptance to all that should believe in him;* together with the *whole plan of the Gospel salvation;* must be regarded as inseparably connected with that event, and infallibly established by it — — —]

2. A cordial approbation of them—

[To suppose that the words of Thomas were a mere exclamation, only shews to what miserable shifts Socinians are reduced, in order to maintain their views of Christianity. For, not to mention that such an horrible profanation of God's holy name could not be supposed to issue from an Apostle, in the very presence of his Lord, under such peculiar circumstances, we are expressly told that Thomas *addressed those words to our Lord himself;* and consequently they can be interpreted in no other way than an acknowledgment of Christ as "his Lord and his God." And here we may observe, that Thomas does not merely acknowledge Christ from the conviction of his mind, in the same way as the worshippers of Baal acknowledged the supremacy of Jehovah, "The Lord, He is *the* God; the Lord, He is *the* God[c];" but with most affectionate endear-

[c] 1 Kings xviii. 39.

ment claims him as *his* Lord, and *his* God. Thus must we do: we must receive him as *our* God and Saviour, determining to rely on him alone, to confess him before the whole world, to consecrate to him all our powers both of body and soul, and to glory in him as "all our salvation and all our desire." The language of our hearts must be, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee[d]."]

From a more particular view of this narrative, we may LEARN—

1. The evil of unbelief—

[Infidels pretend that their doubts arise from a want of evidence: but they in reality arise from an indisposition of heart to weigh with candour the evidence before them. This was the fault which Thomas now committed. He did not dispassionately consider the testimony of the other Apostles, but determinately set himself against it; and would admit of no proof, except such as he himself should presume to dictate. And justly might he have been left for ever to perish in his unbelief, because he would not receive a testimony that was decisive of the point. It is precisely thus also with nominal Christians, who, while they admit the truth of Christianity in general, deny every truth that presses on their consciences, and will receive nothing that does not accord with their own preconceived notions. But, as they who came out of Egypt, as the Lord's people, perished in the wilderness through their unbelief, so will these never enter into the heavenly Canaan, unless they receive, and act upon, the whole "truth as it is in Christ Jesus." There is quite evidence enough to satisfy the humble inquirer: there is no real ground for doubt, either respecting the way of salvation through a crucified Redeemer, or respecting that holiness of heart and life which he requires: and if men will not "receive the truth in the love of it," they must expect that "God will give them up to believe a lie," to the everlasting ruin of their souls[e].]

2. The folly of neglecting ordinances—

[Thomas was not with the other Apostles on the evening when our Lord first appeared to them; if he had, there is reason to suppose that he would have been satisfied of the truth of Christ's resurrection, as well as they. But, through his absence, he lost that opportunity of beholding his risen Lord; and thus continued in a state of anxious suspense for a whole week, after the rest were "filled with joy and peace in believing." As we know not the reason of his absence, we

[d] Cant. v. 16. Ps. lxxiii. 25. [e] 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.

do not condemn him for it: but his loss was the same, by whatever it might be occasioned. And have not many of us suffered loss through our absence from the house of God, or the neglect of private ordinances? It is highly probable that the doubts and fears of many are to be traced to this source: they live without the light of God's countenance, because they are not careful "to *walk* with God:" they neglect him; and then he hides himself from them[f]. We can scarcely doubt but that all of us might have enjoyed far richer manifestations of the Saviour's love, if we had been more diligent and watchful in our performance of religious duties. "Let us not then forsake the assembling of ourselves together (as the manner of some is)," or intermit our exertions in our secret chamber: but, if we should even wait without a blessing as long as the cripple waited at Bethesda's pool, let us at least secure this consolation, that we have not lost it through our own neglect; and expect assuredly, that, if we are "steadfast and immoveable in waiting upon God, our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."]

3. The wonderful condescension of the Lord Jesus—

[Notwithstanding the obstinate unbelief of Thomas, our Lord did not cast him off, but even appeared a second time to his Disciples, *on purpose to grant him* the evidence he desired. What amazing condescension was this! Yet it is precisely such as all of us experience at his hands. "He is not extreme to mark what is done amiss" by any of us: He bears with our infirmities, "not breaking the bruised reed nor quenching the smoking flax, but bringing forth judgment unto truth." We, alas! are too often unreasonably dictating to him, when we should rather be meekly submitting to his providence and grace: we refuse to rest upon his promises, unless they be applied to us in such a particular way, or we be enabled to find in ourselves some particular warrant for our faith. But we should take his promises simply as they are given; and expect the accomplishment of them, not because we are worthy, but "because He is faithful who has promised." We do not mean that we are to expect him to save us whilst we are living in sin; for he has not anywhere promised any such thing: but we would have all to "walk by faith, and not by sight;" for it is still as true as ever, that "blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."]

[f] 2 Chron. xv. 2.

OUTLINE NO. 1733

THE USE AND INTENT OF OUR LORD'S MIRACLES.

John xx. 30, 31. *And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*

THOUGH the miracles which are recorded in the Gospel are very numerous, yet are they few in comparison of those which were wrought by our blessed Lord. If all that he performed were distinctly related with all their attendant circumstances, St. John tells us, in the hyperbolical language of the east, that the whole world would scarcely be able to contain the books that would be written[a]. Some however are transmitted to posterity as a specimen of the rest, in order that we may be assured of Christ's divine mission, and be led to believe in him to the salvation of our souls.

The evangelist, stating both the immediate and the ultimate end for which his Gospel was written, declares, that *the assuring us of Christ's divine mission* was,

I. The *immediate* end—

Our blessed Lord declared himself to be "the Christ, the Son of God"—

[It was not in the character of a common prophet that our Lord appeared; he assumed to himself titles to which no human being had aspired, and declared himself to be the Son of God, the incarnate Deity, the Saviour of the world[b] — — —]

For the conviction of *the people of that day* he *wrought* unnumbered miracles—

[Miracles are works contrary to the common course of nature, works which God alone is able to perform. Hence,

[a] John xxi. 25.

[b] His enemies themselves accused him of affecting equality with God; and finding, from the very defence that he made, that they were right in their conjecture, they again sought to put him to death as a blasphemer. John v. 18. and x. 33, 37—39.

when wrought in confirmation of any point, they are justly considered as authenticating that which they are intended to support; because they prove a divine concurrence; and we cannot suppose that God should enable any man to work miracles merely to establish falsehood, and to deceive his people.

There have indeed been sorceries and enchantments practised, perhaps also miracles, in support of error[c]. But, in the case alluded to, God suffered Satan to exercise extraordinary powers in order to harden him who obstinately opposed his will, and to confirm him in the delusions which he had chosen for himself[d]. Yet in those instances did he give abundant proof of his own superiority, and leave the confounded monarch without excuse[e].

That the miracles which Jesus did, were intended to convince the Jews of his Divine mission, and that they were sufficient for that end, is manifest from the appeal which he himself repeatedly made to them in this very view[f]. The completion of prophecy was indeed a decisive proof of his Messiahship to those who could compare the prophecies with the events; but that was a long and arduous process; a work which but few were competent to undertake: whereas the working of miracles afforded a short, compendious, and incontestible evidence to the eyes of all who beheld them.]

For the conviction of *future ages* these miracles were *recorded*—

[If there had been no written documents of the things that were transacted, we could not have been sure that our information respecting them was correct; seeing that many variations must inevitably happen in traditions handed down through so many succeeding ages. But when the miracles of our Lord were recorded by persons who were eye-witnesses of the same, and these records were speedily circulated amongst myriads who also had been spectators of them; and when in these very writings an appeal was made to the bitterest enemies of our Lord, who would have been glad enough to contradict the assertions of the Evangelists on a supposition that they could have been disproved; these records come down to us with an

[c] Exod. vii. 10, 11.

[d] Isai. lxvi. 4. Ps. ix. 16. Exod. vii. 3, 13, 14.

[e] Aaron's rod swallowed up all the rods of the sorcerers, Exod. vii. 12. The sorcerers were permitted to bring calamities on the land, but not to remove them, Exod. vii. 21, 22. and viii. 6, 7. And they themselves were constrained to acknowledge a divine power working by Moses and Aaron, when they could no longer imitate the miracles wrought by them, Exod. viii. 18, 19.

[f] John v. 36. and xiv. 11.

evidence not at all inferior to ocular demonstration: and if any man reject the testimony which is thus sanctioned both by friends and enemies, he is wilfully blind, and would reject any other evidence that could be given him[g].]

But though this was the immediate intent of these written memorials, *the salvation of our souls* was,

II. The *ultimate* end—

Merely to prove to us that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, would have been a fruitless task, unless our believing of that record would conduce to our benefit. But the Apostle knew, that our whole salvation depends upon it; and therefore, in transmitting an account of our Saviour's miracles, he sought to bring us to the enjoyment of life;

1. Of spiritual life—

[The unbeliever is "dead in trespasses and sins[h]:" he is as incapable of spiritual exertion, as dry bones, that have been entombed for many years, are of exercising the functions belonging to the body[i]. Nor is it by *working*, that he is to obtain life (for he must have life before he *can* work *aright*) but by *believing* in the Lord Jesus Christ. By believing, he becomes united to Christ, as a scion that is grafted into a new stock; and he derives life from him, as a branch does from the tree, or as a member from the head[k]. No sooner is that union formed, than he becomes a new creature[l]; "he is passed from death unto life[m];" and is "purged from dead works to serve the living God." For the sake of Christ he is made "a partaker of the Divine nature[n]:" "Christ himself lives in him," and "is that very life[o]," whereby he is enabled to live to God.]

2. Of eternal life—

[The life begun on earth, is not like the natural life that shall soon expire; it is an incorruptible seed, an immortal principle, which, when watered and invigorated by continued supplies of grace, shall flourish in heaven for evermore. The soul that is quickened by faith in the Lord Jesus, has also its iniquities forgiven. It stands immediately in the nearest relation to the Deity. The believer is a child of God, an heir of God, a joint-heir with Christ[p]. A throne is prepared for him in heaven: and, on his dismission from the body, he shall be exalted to an eternal participation of the Divine glory.

[g] Luke xvi. 31. [h] Eph. ii. 1. [i] Ezek. xxxvii. 4.
[k] 1 Cor. vi. 17. Eph. iv. 15, 16. [l] 2 Cor. v. 17.
[m] John v. 24. [n] 2 Pet. i. 4.
[o] Gal. ii. 20. Col. iii. 4. [p] John i. 12.

Now this is the object which the Evangelists had in view, when they recorded the miracles of our Lord. They endeavoured to convince us, that Jesus was the Christ; yet not merely to extort from us a speculative assent to this truth, but to make us rely on him as our Saviour, that we might experience the true "end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls." This was an end worthy the inspired writers, an end, which has in myriads of instances already been accomplished, though its success hitherto has been only as the drop before the shower.]

INFER—

1. How should we value the Holy Scriptures!

[All the books that ever were written are of no value when compared with the sacred volume. In the Scriptures, we not only think, but know, that we have eternal life[q]. They testify of Christ: they declare him to be our incarnate God, our all-sufficient propitiation, our ever-living advocate, our Almighty friend. He is no longer sojourning with us on earth; but we may see him, hear him, converse with him, and enjoy the most intimate fellowship with him, in his word. In that word we may find abundance to confirm our faith, to enliven our hope, to direct our feet, to answer every purpose which our hearts can wish. Let us then "search the Scriptures:" let our meditation be upon them: let them be "sweeter to us than honey and the honey-comb:" let them be "esteemed by us more than our necessary food."]

2. How careful should we be to exercise faith on Christ!

[All our knowledge even of the Scriptures themselves will be of little use to us, unless we be possessed of a living faith: they will indeed "make us wise unto salvation;" but then it is "*through faith in Christ Jesus*[r]." More *can* not be said, and less *must* not, respecting the excellency of faith, than what is spoken in the words of our text. Every thing relating to spiritual or eternal life must be received by faith, and maintained by faith. In heaven this principle will be superseded; but till we arrive at those happy mansions, we must "walk by faith," and "live altogether by faith on the Son of God, who loved us, and gave himself for us."

Let us then read the Scriptures, in order to increase and confirm our faith: let even the strongest believer improve them to this end[s]; and in due time he shall be where faith is lost in sight, and hope in enjoyment.]

[q] John v. 39. [r] 2 Tim. iii. 15. [s] 1 John v. 13.

OUTLINE NO. 1734

INQUIRIES ABOUT LOVE TO CHRIST.

John xxi. 17. *He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.*

IT requires much wisdom to discharge the office of a reprover aright. We have a duty to the Church, not to countenance sin in any one, and least of all in a person professing godliness: on the other hand, we have a duty to our offending brother, not to wound his feelings by a needless severity. If his fault have been private, a private admonition will suffice; but if his sin have given open offence, we must bear a public testimony against him, and require a public acknowledgment of his fault. Our blessed Lord was full of compassion towards Peter, after his shameful dereliction of duty: he looked upon him with pity; he appeared to him before any other of his Apostles; and restored him publicly to his office, from which he had fallen. But in what manner did he restore him? He drew forth from him, in the presence of all the Apostles, repeated confessions of his faith and love; and re-invested him with his Apostolic commission, precisely as often as Peter had publicly renounced it.

The questions put to Peter on this occasion, and the answers he gave to them, will naturally furnish us with the following remarks:

I. That repeated violations of duty are a just ground for questioning our love to Christ—

There is no surer test of our love to Christ, than our obedience to his commands—

[This is what our blessed Lord himself requires as the fruit and evidence of our love; "If ye love me, keep my commandments[a]." And certainly a more unexceptionable test cannot be conceived. Had he required only some particular feelings, a person of a sanguine disposition might easily have wrought up himself to those frames which he supposed

[a] John xiv. 15.

to be indications of love to Christ: and many, on the contrary, might have been discouraged, under the idea that they never had experienced what was necessary to their salvation. But the evidence of an obedient life is such as no man can have who does not love the Lord[b], and as every man will have who does love the Lord[c]: so that it is less likely to be mistaken than any other, and carries stronger conviction with it: it enables us to determine with certainty, who does love him, and who does not[d]. St. John, who was, beyond all others, the loving, and beloved Disciple, not only establishes this as the most unequivocal test of our love[e], but without hesitation pronounces him a "liar," who pretends to have any knowledge of the Saviour, without justifying his pretensions by this mark[f]. We may therefore assume this as an infallible distinction between those who are sincere followers of Christ, and those who are only hypocrites and dissemblers with God.]

In proportion as this evidence is wanting, doubts must be entertained of our love to Christ—

[We speak not now of a course of open sin, which would at once brand us as enemies of Christ: nor, on the other hand, do we speak of those infirmities which are found in the best of men: we refer rather to those habitual deviations from duty which afford us just reason to doubt of our state. We know that, amongst men, there is always a desire to please those whom we love. The "loving one another in word and in tongue is contrasted with the loving in deed and in truth[g]." And supposing the fact to be true, that was an unanswerable question which Delilah put to Sampson; "How canst thou say 'I love thee,' when thy heart is not with me[h]?" If then our heart be not with Christ, if we seek not after him in earnest prayer, if we feel no desire to do his will, if we live in a way which is displeasing to him, if we indulge dispositions and habits which are directly opposite to those which he himself cultivated, how can we imagine that we love him? Such a life is rather characteristic of his enemies than of his friends: and, while we live in such a state, we have far greater reason to suspect our love to him, than to indulge any confidence respecting it.]

We wonder not that "Peter was grieved" at being a third time questioned about the sincerity of his love: for we cannot but feel,

[b] John xiv. 24.
[c] John xiv. 23.
[d] John xiv. 21. with 2 Cor. viii. 8.
[e] 1 John v. 3. and 2 John, ver. 6.
[f] 1 John ii. 3, 4.
[g] 1 John iii. 18.
[h] Judg. xvi. 15.

II. That the very existence of a doubt respecting it ought to fill us with deep concern—

Let it only be considered, what such a doubt implies: it involves a doubt,

1. Respecting our interest in God's favour—

[There is no medium between a state of acceptance with God, and of obnoxiousness to his wrath and indignation. We must either be his friends or his enemies: we must either be his children, or "the children of the wicked one." Now our blessed Lord has said, "If God were your father, ye would love me[i]:" and consequently, if there be room for questioning our love to him, there is room also for questioning our relation to God. And is it not an awful thing to doubt, whether we be children of God, or children of the devil? Is it a light matter, to whom we belong? Should any man feel composed or satisfied, till he has ascertained this point on sure and scriptural grounds?]

2. Respecting our prospects in the eternal world—

[There are two states, in one or other of which all will be placed as soon as they go hence: to some will be assigned a state of happiness in heaven; to others a state of misery in hell: and whichever be our lot, it will be eternal.

Now that heaven cannot be the receptacle of those who love not the Lord Jesus, is evident: for what should they do there: or how could they be happy, if they were there? We are not happy even here amongst those whom we do not love; notwithstanding we may manage to conceal our aversion, and to put on a cheerful countenance before them: but in heaven there can be no concealment: our real dispositions will all be manifest; and if we cannot cordially unite in the exercises of those around us, we shall find nothing to amuse or divert our minds: in other words, if our whole delight be not in singing "praises to God and to the Lamb," we shall find no congeniality of sentiment with those around us, nor any occupation suited to our taste: and the very consciousness of our unfitness for the place, will render the place dreary, the company odious, the employment irksome.

And must it not be inexpressibly painful to be left in suspense; to see time running away, and eternity fast approaching, and not to know whether we shall spend that eternity in heaven or in hell? If we were not ourselves melancholy examples of the same obduracy, we should wonder how any one could give sleep to his eyes, or slumber to his eye-lids, till he had attained some solution of this doubt. Were he only in suspense about the issue of a trial for life and death, it

[i] John viii. 42.

would create considerable anxiety: how much more then should it, when it respects everlasting happiness or everlasting misery! Well indeed may that man be grieved, who is in the least doubt what answer he shall give to the question in our text, "Lovest thou me?"]

We cannot however but take occasion from the instance before us to observe,

III. That notwithstanding we have deviated for a time from the path of duty, we may be so far recovered as to warrant an appeal to Christ, that we do indeed love him—

God forbid that we should encourage any man to think lightly of sin; or that any thing we speak for the comfort of true penitents should have such a construction put upon it. Yet we must not conceal the truth, for fear it should be perverted; nor must we forbear to magnify the grace of God, lest some one should abuse it. Our position, properly understood, will not sanction false confidence in any man. We concede, that a man may have fallen as grossly as ever Peter did, yet may he afterwards recover his confidence towards God, provided, like Peter, he,

1. Bitterly bewail his sin—

[Peter, after his fall, "went out and wept bitterly:" and as our Lord had particularly "prayed for him, that his faith might not fail," we can have no doubt but that he sought for mercy in God's appointed way. Now let this be done in sincerity and truth, and we do not hesitate to declare, that it shall not be done in vain: whether the guilt be contracted by an ignorant opposer of the Gospel, or a backslidden professor of it, and whether it be more or less heinous, it shall certainly be forgiven[k], and peace shall be again restored to his wounded conscience. "God will heal his backslidings, and love him freely," yea, and seal a sense of his pardoning love upon his soul. Upon his confessing with David, "I have sinned against the Lord," the Lord will say to him, "I have put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." But besides this he must,]

2. Take occasion from his fall to search out and mortify his besetting sin—

[Peter's besetting sins were self-preference, and self-confidence. He had such an over-weening conceit of his own strength, that he engaged, that "though all the other

[k] Isai. i. 18. 1 John i. 7, 9.

Apostles should forsake their Lord, he never would: no; he would rather die with him than deny him." To this our Lord alludes in his first question, "Lovest thou me *more than these?*" To that part of the question Peter made no reply: he would no more boast of his superiority to others; but was contented with affirming what from his inmost soul he knew to be true. Moreover, he seems many years afterwards to have had in view his own fatal miscarriage, when he gave that advice to the Church at large; "Be sober, be vigilant; for your adversary the devil goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist, steadfast in the faith." Thus he learned both humility and caution from his past experience.

A similar effect in us will warrant a similar assurance of our love to Christ. It is often a long time before our besetting sin be even known to us: for sin has such a bewitching power, that it makes us not unfrequently admire as a virtue, what others see and know to be a weakness and a crime. Pride, envy, covetousness, and a variety of other evils, often lurk and reign in us, while we are scarcely sensible of their existence in our hearts. Now if we have been led to search out these hidden abominations, to mourn over them, to subdue and mortify them, and maintain a spirit directly opposed to them, we can scarcely wish for a clearer evidence of our sincerity: the very fruit we produce, indisputably proves our union with Christ; and consequently justifies an assured conviction of our love to him. Thus humbling himself for his iniquity, he must yet further,]

3. Be determined, through grace, to live and die for Christ—

[If sin be unrepented of, or self-confidence be indulged, our resolutions, like Peter's, may prove fallacious: but if formed with a humble dependence upon Divine grace, and with a penitent sense of our former miscarriages, they afford a strong additional testimony on our behalf. Peter speedily evinced the renovation of his soul, when with undaunted courage he charged home upon all the Jewish Sanhedrim the murder of his Lord, and set at nought all their threatenings against him. And if *we* also are enabled boldly to confess Christ, and cheerfully to suffer for him, and unreservedly to devote ourselves unto him, the matter is clear; we do indeed love him; and we may appeal to the heart-searching God that we "love him in sincerity" and truth.]

Let us now institute the same all-important INQUIRY, and address to every one of you the question in the text. Let each one put his own name in the place

of Peter's, and conceive the Lord Jesus Christ saying to him, Lovest *thou* me? Perhaps all of you, except a few humble and contrite souls, will be ready to answer this question in the affirmative: but if you would enter more dispassionately into it, some of you might possibly apply to yourselves what was spoken to the unbelieving Jews, "I know you, that ye have *not* the love of God in you[l]." Others of you might be in doubt what answer to make; while others might be able to adopt the language of Peter, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

Taking for granted that there are these three descriptions of persons here present, we shall ADDRESS ourselves,

1. To those who manifestly do not love the Lord Jesus Christ—

[How surprising is it that there should be such persons in the world! yet this is the state of the generality even of those who live in this Christian land. And what shall I say to them? Are you not yourselves amazed at your own wickedness? Do you not appear to yourselves to be even monsters in impiety? Not to love Him, who is infinitely lovely! Not to love Him, who is so beloved of God, and of the holy angels, and of all the saints both in heaven and earth! Not to love Him, who has so loved you as to give himself for you, and to lay down his own life a ransom for your souls! How astonishing is it that his wrath has not long since broken forth against you to the uttermost to consume you! Must you not assent to the justice of that denunciation, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema, maran-atha[m]?" And do you not tremble lest the curse of God should come upon you? O rest not in a state of such dreadful guilt and danger: but contemplate HIM; and turn unto HIM; and make HIM "the only beloved of your souls."]

2. To those who are in doubt whether they love him or not—

[Do not leave this matter any longer in suspense. Search your own hearts, and beg of God to search and try you. Indulge not a needless scrupulosity on the one hand, neither "speak peace unto your souls lightly" on the other hand. Of the two, it were better to be distressed by raising the standard too high, than to deceive yourselves by putting it too low; because, in the one case, your pain will be only small and

[l] John v. 42. [m] 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

transient; whereas, in the other, it will be unspeakable and eternal. Not that it is at all needful to err on either side: the marks and evidences of true love to Christ are laid down with the utmost precision in the Holy Scriptures; and if you read the Scriptures with earnest prayer to God for the illumination of his Spirit, "He will guide you into all truth." If you are destitute of true love, he will convince you of sin; and if you are possessed of it, he will shine upon his own work, and give you the witness of his Spirit that you are his. Your Lord and Judge "*knoweth all things:*" him therefore you cannot deceive: O pray that you may not deceive yourselves.]

3. To those who can truly say, "Lord, I do indeed love thee"—

[How sweet to you must be those words of our Lord, "If any man love me, my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him[n]." You may rest assured, that these words shall be fulfilled to you. There is not any mercy which God will not vouchsafe to those who make Christ their ALL IN ALL. While you have a scriptural evidence that you do this, you have a right to rejoice: and your joy is an earnest of that everlasting blessedness which you shall possess in his immediate presence.

Be careful then to "abide in his love." Guard against every thing that may impeach the sincerity of your regard. "Keep yourselves diligently in his love;" and be attentive to the duties of your calling, whatever they may be. To Peter, who was a minister of his Gospel, our Lord said, "Feed my sheep; feed my lambs; feed my sheep." This he required of him as the best testimony of his regard. To you he says, "Finish the work which God hath given thee to do." Can you instruct others, whether adults or children? embrace every opportunity with joy. Can you do any thing whereby your Lord may be glorified? do it: and "whatever your hand findeth to do, do it with your might."]

[ANOTHER EXORDIUM.—It is universally acknowledged, that men ought to inquire into their actions, so far at least as to ascertain that they are just and honourable: but few are aware of the obligation which they lie under, to examine the dispositions of their minds towards God. Yet this is of prime importance. We should ask ourselves frequently, Do I love God? Do I love the Lord Jesus Christ, my Saviour? This was the question which our Lord himself put to Peter after his fall. The question and the answer given to it, furnish us with a fit occasion to observe—]

[n] John xiv. 23.

THE ACTS.

OUTLINE NO. 1735

CHRIST'S ASCENSION.

Acts i. 9—11. *And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven, as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*

WE are surprised to see how slow of heart the Apostles were to receive and understand the instructions given them from time to time by their Divine Master. If he spoke to them of his death, they could not endure the thought of such an issue to his ministrations. If he spoke of his resurrection, they could not at all apprehend his meaning, or conceive to what he could refer. In like manner, when he spoke of his returning to his Father in heaven, and declared to them the special ends of his ascension, and of the deep interest which they themselves had in it, (since he was going to prepare a place for them, and to send them another Comforter, who should far more than compensate them for the loss of his bodily presence,) they could not enter into the subject. They thought, indeed, that they understood him, and said, "Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb[a]:" but they shewed, even after his resurrection, how ignorant they were; since they still dreamed

[a] John xvi. 28, 29.

of his establishing a temporal kingdom, and asked, in reference to it, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel[b]?" It was thus that they surveyed the ascension of their Lord at this time. Instead of being prepared for it, and expecting the completion of his work on earth, they stood and gazed at him, with a kind of stupid amazement; till two Angels, in the form of men, reproved their stupidity: and assured them, that, at a future period, their Divine Master should again return to earth, in a way similar to that of his departure from it.

The points for our present consideration are,

I. The ends of his ascension to heaven—

These are fully declared in the Holy Scriptures. He ascended,

1. To receive a recompence for himself—

[The Father had engaged in covenant with him, that, "if he would make his soul an offering for sin, he should see a seed, and prolong his days; and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hands[c]." In this compact, his human nature was ordained to have a full participation of his glory, being enthroned at the right hand of God, and, by its union with the Godhead, invested with all the honours due to the Most High God. "All the angels in heaven," no less than his redeemed saints, were "bidden to worship him[d]." And to this, in part at least, he looked forward, as to "the joy that was set before him;" in consideration of which "he endured the cross, and despised the shame, till he sat down on the right hand of the throne of God[e]." All this was conferred on him as the recompence of his humiliation: for so says the holy Apostle: He, "being in the form of God, thought it no robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. WHEREFORE God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father[f]." And in his ascension was in some degree fulfilled

[b] ver. 6.
[c] Isai. liii. 10.
[d] Ps. xcvii. 7. with Heb. i. 6.
[e] Heb. xii. 2.
[f] Phil. ii. 6—11.

that vision of the prophet Daniel: "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man *came with the clouds of heaven*, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed[g].]

2. To carry on and perfect his work for us—

[As our great High-Priest, he offered himself a sacrifice upon the cross. But, in order to execute the whole of that sacred office, he must carry that blood within the veil, and offer incense also before the mercy-seat: nor, till he should have done this, would he have any authority to bless his people. Accordingly, in his ascension he performed this remaining part of his priestly office: entering into heaven with his own blood, and offering before God the incense of his continual intercession[h].

But his kingly office also was now to be executed, in a fuller manner than it had yet been. David had said, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool[i]." And again; "The stone which the builders refused, the same is made the head of the corner[k]." This, therefore, now remained to be fulfilled: and for the accomplishment of it, Christ was now exalted to glory. And this accords with the account given us by St. Peter: "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ[l]." To the same effect St. Paul also speaks: "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he gave gifts unto men: he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come, in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ[m]." This

[g] Dan. vii. 13, 14. [h] Heb. ix. 11, 12, 24. [i] Ps. cx. 1.
[k] Ps. cxviii. 22. [l] Acts ii. 32—36. [m] Eph. iv. 7—14.

then, I say, was the end of his ascension; and in this way was fulfilled what St. Paul had spoken respecting him: "God raised him up, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all[n]."]

In connexion with this, we are of necessity led to consider,

II. The time and manner of his future advent—

There are two periods at which the Lord Jesus Christ may certainly be expected to come again, *after the manner of his departure* from this lower world[o]:

1. At the period of the Millennium, to establish his kingdom—

[Christ laid the foundation of his kingdom in the Apostolic age: and it has been maintained and carried forward, even to the present day. But there is a time coming, when all the kingdoms of the world shall be subdued unto him, and he alone shall reign over the face of the whole earth[p]. That I apprehend to be the season called, in Scripture, "the times of the restitution of all things;" till which period the heavens have received him: but when that period shall have arrived, "he will again be sent, after the manner of his departure hence[q]," in power and great glory. And it seems, from prophecy, that, as he ascended from the mount of Olives, so on that very mount will he again appear[r], and not improbably as he did once on Mount Tabor; but certainly to establish his empire over the face of the whole earth[s]. Then will take place what is called in Scripture the first resurrection, when, it is said, all his saints shall rise, in order to reign with him. Whether this shall be spiritually accomplished, as beyond all doubt the resurrection of God's ancient people, spoken of by the Prophet Ezekiel, will be[t]; or whether any, or all, of them will be summoned to meet him, as Moses and Elias were on the Mount of Transfiguration; I will not take upon me to determine. But I must enter my protest against that bold, confident obtrusion of this matter upon the Church of Christ, which we have witnessed of

[n] Eph. i. 20—23.
[o] οὕτως ὃν τρόπον.
[p] Dan. ii. 44.
[q] Acts iii. 20, 21.
[r] Zech. xiv. 4.
[s] Zech. xiv. 9.
[t] Ezek. xxxvii. 1—14.

late, and which has tended exceedingly to draw away the minds of many pious people from the more sober and serious contemplation of matters of far deeper interest, and of incomparably greater certainty. I object not to the consideration of any point contained in holy writ: but I deprecate the giving of such extraordinary and almost paramount importance to things which, to say the least, are extremely questionable, and which, if ever so fully established, would tend in no degree to quicken the soul in the service of its God. For, whether we are to enjoy the presence of our God and Saviour in heaven or on earth, it can make no difference in our present duties, nor can it add one jot or tittle to our present encouragements. And the grievous errors which have been broached by some who have been most zealous in propagating their Millenarian notions, are abundantly sufficient to keep all prudent persons from being drawn into their vortex[u]. Of this however we are certain, that "all the ends of the earth are given to the Lord Jesus for his possession," and that in the appointed season, which we hope is now fast approaching, "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." Yes, whether by his personal appearance, or by the operations of his Holy Spirit, "he shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his Ancients gloriously[x]."]

2. At the last day to judge the world—

[Of this our blessed Lord himself has spoken fully. "The Son of man shall be seen coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory." "He shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him: then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats[y]." This is the advent spoken of also by St. Paul, who says, "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God." "He shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire; taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from

[u] The sleep of the soul, for instance: the worshipping of idols not being idolatry, provided the worshipper believe them to be God: and other things, which have been stated in conversation to the Author, too horrible to be mentioned; but which, it is hoped, are peculiar to the individual who stated them, and not common to those who maintain the other sentiments. But God alone knows to what all this extravagance may lead. [Written May 1828.]

[x] Isai. xxiv. 23. [y] Matt. xxiv. 30. and xxv. 31, 32.

the glory of his power[z]." "In that day every eye shall see him[a]," and every soul receive from him his everlasting doom[b].

This being universally acknowledged amongst us, I will wave any further discussion of it as *a fact to be established*, and call your attention to it only as *a truth to be improved*.

A mere vacant gaze, like that of the Apostles, or, what I should consider as equally worthless, a mere speculative acknowledgment, I would join with the holy angels in reproving, as altogether unsuitable to the occasion. But I would say, *Direct your eyes to the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven*, and *prepare for his future appearance in the clouds of heaven*. You cannot have your eyes too earnestly fixed upon him. Look at him as "your Forerunner," "gone thither to prepare a place for you." Look at him as your Head, that insures to all his members a participation of his glory. Look at him as your Advocate and Intercessor, who maintains continually your peace with God, and secures to you all needful supplies of grace and strength. Look to him as "possessing in himself all fulness for you," that "out of his fulness you may receive all that you can ever stand in need of." Look at him as "your very life:" and let your soul rejoice in the assurance, that, "when he shall appear, you also shall appear with him," as "the fruit of his travail," the trophies of his victory, "the jewels of his crown." And, whilst looking for his advent, keep "your loins girt, and your lamps trimmed, and yourselves as servants waiting for the coming of their Lord." This is the proper posture of his people, to be "waiting for his appearing," "loving it," delighting in it, and "hastening it forward[c]" by all possible means; that, at whatever hour he shall come, you may enter with him into his presence-chamber, and be for ever happy in the fruition of his love.]

[z] 1 Thess. iv. 16. and 2 Thess. i. 7—9. [a] Rev. i. 7.
[b] 2 Cor. v. 10. [c] 2 Tim. iv. 8. Heb. ix. 28. 2 Pet. iii. 12.

OUTLINE NO. 1736

OUT-POURING OF THE SPIRIT.

Acts ii. 1—4. *And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

IT was not long after the Flood that man retained the knowledge of the true God. No sooner did the posterity of Noah begin to multiply upon earth, than they conceived an idea of counteracting the intentions of their Maker in relation to their dispersion over the world, and actually began to build a city sufficiently large for their accommodation, and a tower which might place them out of the reach of any future deluge. When they had made considerable progress in the work, God was pleased to inflict upon them a judgment, which instantly put a stop to the building, and compelled them to separate themselves to different and distant places. They had hitherto been "all of one language and one speech:" but now "God confounded their language, so that they could not understand one another." This introduced such confusion, that they could not prosecute their purpose, but were necessitated to form themselves into distinct societies, each uniting with the party whose speech he understood. From hence the knowledge of the true God was speedily lost; till in a few generations it seemed to have vanished from among the children of men. This knowledge however was revived in Abraham, and continued in a part of his posterity, till the time came that God had fixed for the diffusion of it over the face of the whole earth. The time so fixed was after the ascension of our blessed Lord: then was his Gospel to be preached to all nations: and, in order that it might be so, God reversed, as it were, the judgment he had before inflicted; not indeed by restoring an unity of language among all nations, but by enabling his chosen servants to address all people in their native tongue. This miracle is to be the subject of our present discourse: and we shall,

I. Make some observations for the illustration of it—

The miracle itself was the enabling of the Apostles, without any previous study, to speak with propriety and fluency whatever language was most familiar to their respective hearers; and to communicate

unerring information on the great subject of religion, which, till that hour, they very imperfectly understood. Now, if we reflect how difficult it is even for men of learning to attain a new language, and how much time and study are necessary to acquire any proficiency in speaking it, we shall see how stupendous a miracle this was, which enabled a number of illiterate fishermen to address foreigners of different nations, whose language they had never so much as heard. But there are some peculiar circumstances respecting this miracle, to which we would call your more particular attention:

1. The *time* when it was wrought—

[There were in the year three great feasts, at which all the males in Israel were required to go up to Jerusalem: namely, the Passover, or feast of unleavened bread; the Pentecost, or feast of weeks; and the feast of tabernacles. The first was appointed in commemoration of their deliverance from Egypt; and the second (the period referred to in our text) was held in remembrance of the giving the law from Mount Sinai, fifty days after their departure from Egypt[a]. Now God was pleased to make that very day on which he had proclaimed his law, the day for publishing his Gospel also: that so their connexion might the more plainly appear, and the one might be the more fully acknowledged as introductory to the other.

It is further to be remarked, that on the day of Pentecost, "the *first-fruits*" of the wheat harvest were offered unto God, as the first-fruits of the barley harvest had been seven weeks before[b]. This also, no doubt, was designed of God to typify the first-fruits of the Jewish Church, which were now presented unto him. It is certain that converts, whether from among Jews or Gentiles, were so designated[c], and especially the first in any place[d]: and consequently, the typical offering was, as it were, completed on this day, in the conversion of three thousand persons unto Christ.

Moreover, it is probable that the *anointing* of the first-fruits also had respect to the out-pouring of the Spirit upon the converts on this day[e]: for that very idea is distinctly suggested by St. Paul in reference to the Gentile converts, who were brought by him as "an offering in a clean vessel unto the

[a] Exod. xix. 1, 11.
[b] Lev. xxiii. 15—17.
[c] Jam. i. 18. Rev. xiv. 4.
[d] Rom. xvi. 5.
[e] Lev. ii. 1.

Lord[f]," and were accepted of the Lord, "being *sanctified by the Holy Ghost*[g]."]

2. The *manner* in which it was wrought—

[As in the *time* of working the miracle we see *types fulfilled*, so in the *manner* of its being wrought we behold *emblems* illustrated and *realized*. The attention of the whole multitude was fixed by an appeal both to their eyes and ears. "They heard a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind." Our Lord compares the influences of the Spirit to wind; "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit[h]." Who then must not recognize in this tempest the *inexplicable*, but *effectual*, operations of the Spirit on the minds of men?

At the same time "cloven tongues, like as of fire, appeared," and abode visibly on the head of all who were then assembled. Now we know, it is the property of fire to enlighten, to warm, to purify: and such were to be the effects of the Spirit which was poured out upon them; for whilst, by the diversity of tongues in which they spake, they communicated light and understanding to the world; they inflamed them with love to the Lord Jesus Christ, and transformed them into the very image of their God: and thus was the prophecy of John the Baptist accomplished; "I baptize you with water; but He that cometh after me shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and *with fire*[i]."]

Such was the miracle, which, however interesting in itself, derives a still greater interest from the circumstances before referred to. We now proceed to,

II. Suggest some reflections for the IMPROVEMENT of it—

The decided proof which it gave of Christ's Messiahship, and of the power and glory to which he is exalted, must naturally suggest itself to every mind. We therefore wave the consideration of the miracle in that view, (more especially as we propose to notice it in the following discourse;) and confine our attention to other reflections less obvious, but equally important:

1. What rich provision has God made for the salvation of the world!

[Was the gift of his only dear Son necessary to redeem

[f] Isai. lxvi. 20. [g] Rom. xv. 16.
[h] John iii. 8. [i] Matt. iii. 11.

us from death and hell? He so loved the world as to give his Son for us. Was more necessary? Was it necessary that the third Person of the blessed Trinity should bear testimony to Christ, and qualify persons to make him known to the world, and actually render their labours effectual for that end? Behold, God sent his Holy Spirit to work this stupendous miracle in confirmation of Christ's Messiahship, and to endue his servants with such powers as were necessary for the preaching of his Gospel to every creature, and to convert to the faith of Christ thousands who but lately had crucified him as a malefactor. What then will he not do for those who desire to be saved? What will *he* refuse us, who has, unsought and unsolicited, done such great things for us? Let us bear in mind that *we* are as much interested in these things as those who lived in the apostolic age; for "the promise is to us, and to our children, and to as many as the Lord our God shall call" — — —]

2. What a striking resemblance appears between the events of that day, and the period wherein we live!

[We confess that miracles have ceased, and that the operations of the Spirit are no longer audible in sounds, or visible in tongues of fire: but have they therefore ceased? No: we affirm that they yet exist; and *that* too in no common measure or degree. Persons, it is true, are not enabled to address themselves successively, without any previous study, to foreigners of every country in their own vernacular tongue; but persons are stirred up to study different languages, and to translate the Scriptures into those languages, so that persons of every country may adopt the same acknowledgment as was used on the day of Pentecost; "We do, every man in his own tongue, hear spoken to us the wonderful works of God[k]." Nor is this effect produced in any slight or partial degree; for persons of every rank, and almost of every nation, are contributing to this blessed end. In our own nation, such an attention has been excited to this work as has never been known since the apostolic age. Nobles, as well as others, have united in disseminating the Holy Scriptures, and in spreading the knowledge of them to the ends of the earth. Is not this work of God? Yes; and, by whomsoever it be opposed, it shall stand; nor shall all the powers of hell prevail against it[l].]

3. How certainly may we expect, ere long, a yet greater work!

[God has reserved in his own power the times and the seasons wherein he will work: but he has assured us, that in

[k] ver. 6, 8, 11. [l] In the year 1812.

due time "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea:" and we have reason to believe that that time is fast approaching. Behold with what astonishing rapidity the work has been carried forward of late! In this land, schools have been set on foot for the education of the poor; so that in a little time we may hope they will be established in almost every town and village in the kingdom. At the same time, Bibles have been so liberally dispersed, that no poor person who desires to possess that heavenly treasure, needs to continue destitute of it. A similar kind of spirit has been diffused through other countries, where even crowned heads[m] are contributing to advance the glorious cause. Above all, the very same means as Providence used for the speedy establishment of Christianity throughout the Roman empire, are at this moment provided against the time that the Spirit shall be poured out to convert the world. At the Passover, the Jews throughout divers countries assembled at Jerusalem, and went home to report what they had seen and heard respecting the death and resurrection of Christ. At the day of Pentecost they did the same, in reference to the ascension of Christ, and the descent of the Holy Spirit, and the instantaneous conversion of thousands to the faith of Christ. Reporting these things in their respective cities, they prepared the way for the ministry of the Apostles, and excited the greatest attention to them. Thus at this day, Jews are spread over all the earth, and for their use the New Testament is translated into Hebrew, at the same time that translations are going forward into all the languages of the world; insomuch that we may hope, in the space of twenty or thirty years, there will be scarcely a nation that shall not possess the Scriptures, or at least a considerable portion of them, in their own language. Moreover, there is a society formed for the express purpose of converting the Jews, and of educating their children in the Christian faith. If then God be pleased to send forth his Spirit upon the Jews by means of the Scriptures which are translated into *their* language, there will be missionaries without number already found in every country under heaven, conversant with the habits and languages of the people among whom they dwell, and able to explain to them the Scriptures which have been previously translated into their respective tongues. What a glorious prospect does this open to us! O that God would even now pour forth his Spirit upon all flesh, that "his word might run and be glorified throughout the earth!"]

[m] The Emperor of Russia, and the Kings of Prussia, Sweden, &c.

OUTLINE NO. 1737

SENDING FORTH OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Acts ii. 32, 33. *This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.*

MARVELLOUS, beyond conception, was the miracle wrought on the day of Pentecost; when a company of illiterate fishermen were enabled, in one moment, to speak a great diversity of languages, with as much ease and fluency and propriety as their own native tongue. Some, who were of a more than ordinary profane character, when they heard foreigners of different nations addressed in languages which they themselves could not understand, said, that the Apostles were drunk with new wine. But the Apostle Peter, repelling the accusation as both unmerited and absurd, shewed that this very miracle had been foretold, as ordained to mark the days of the Messiah, and as intended to introduce that new dispensation to which the descendants of Abraham had looked forward for two thousand years. That we may see the full scope of his argument, I will shew,

I. In what light we should view the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit—

This stupendous miracle had an especial respect to the Lord Jesus Christ,

1. As an evidence of his mission—

[It had been foretold by the Prophet Joel, whose words are cited by the Apostle Peter, and declared to have been accomplished in that event[a]. The testimony of the Apostles, relative to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, on which all his claims to the Messiahship were founded, might be supposed to have been the result of a deep-laid plot: but, in the miraculous powers imparted, there could be no conspiracy; since persons of all the different nations then present at Jerusalem could not but attest the truth of the miracle then wrought. Of *this* the most inveterate enemies were made the judges: and

[a] Compare Joel ii. 28—32. with Acts ii. 16—21

therefore, if *they* were convinced by it, even three thousand of them in one single hour, we may be sure that the evidence was clear and irresistible. If "by his resurrection from the dead, the Lord Jesus was proved to be the Son of God with power," much more was he by his visible ascension to heaven, and his sending forth of the Holy Spirit according to his word.]

2. As the reward of his sufferings—

[The Father had engaged in covenant with the Lord Jesus, that if he would "make his soul an offering for sin, he should see a seed who should prolong their days, and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hands: yea, that he should see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied[b]." And now this promise was fulfilled. By the sending down of the Holy Spirit, the recompence was accorded to him: "the great were divided to him for a portion, and the strong for a spoil, *because he had poured out his soul unto death*, and been numbered with transgressors, and borne the sins of many, and made intercession for transgressors[c]." It was in the prospect of this that he had "endured the cross, and despised the shame, and had sat down at the right hand of the throne of God[d]:" it had been declared unto him, that "he should *receive gifts* for men, even for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them:" and his being empowered to "*confer these gifts*" was, on the Father's part, a fulfilment of the engagement he had entered into[e], and a bestowment of "the benefits which he had purchased with his own blood[f]."]

3. As the pledge and earnest of his glory—

["The prophets, speaking by the Spirit of Christ, had from the beginning testified respecting the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow[g]." Now, this sending forth of the Holy Spirit was the commencement of the Saviour's glory, both amongst Jews and Gentiles[h]: and to this had John the Baptist and our Lord himself referred, as the pledge and earnest of his triumphs[i]. Our blessed Lord, previous to his ascension, had taught his Disciples to expect this: but it was not till the renewal of this miracle to the Gentile converts, six years afterwards, that Peter recollected his words; and *then* they were brought most forcibly to his remembrance: "*Then* remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the

[b] Isai. liii. 10, 11. [c] Isai. liii. 12. [d] Heb. xii. 2
[e] Compare Ps. lxviii. 18. with Eph. iv. 8; and mark the distinction between "received" and "gave."
[f] Acts xx. 28. [g] 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.
[h] Acts xi. 15. [i] Matt. iii. 11. Acts i. 4, 5.

Holy Ghost[k]." In all subsequent effusions of the Holy Spirit has the glory of Christ been advancing, even unto this time[l]; and by this, at a future period, will his kingdom be extended over the face of the whole earth: "when the Spirit will be poured out from on high, the wilderness shall become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest[m]." The request for that effusion of the Spirit needs only to be made by him; and "the heathen shall instantly be given to him for an inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for his possession[n]."]

Nor is this a mere speculative subject. It has a great practical tendency; as will be seen, whilst I shew,

II. What we may learn from it—

Some idea may be formed of the immense importance of this subject, by the mention of two things only, to which I will confine your attention. We may see, then, from hence,

1. What we ourselves, if we believe in Christ, may expect—

[Our blessed Lord, in the days of his flesh, stood in a place of public concourse, and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; and out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe in him should receive[o]." True, in his miraculous powers we are no longer to hope for the Holy Spirit's operations: but, as our Teacher, our Comforter, our Sanctifier, we may expect his influences now, no less than in the apostolic age: for the Lord has promised, saying, "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world[p]." See his discourses just previous to his departure from this world, how full they are of this subject[q] ——— And what assurance he has given us that we shall not seek the Spirit's influence in vain[r]. To every one of you, then, I say, Enlarge your expectations, to the full extent of your necessities: for God the Father will save you by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he will shed forth on you abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour[s]. Indeed I must not content myself with saying that this great gift shall be vouchsafed unto you, if you will believe in Christ; for it is the express

[k] Acts xi. 16. [l] John xvi. 14. [m] Isai. xxxii. 15.
[n] Ps. ii. 8. [o] John vii. 37—39. [p] Matt. xxviii. 20
[q] John xiv. 16, 17, 26. xv. 26. and xvi. 7—13.
[r] Luke xi. 13 [s] Tit. iii. 4—6.

declaration of Almighty God, that, "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his[t]."]

2. In what respects we may ourselves confirm the testimony here given—

[The Apostles, on the day of Pentecost, were witnesses for Christ, not only in a way of oral testimony, but especially in the miraculous powers which they exercised. And though these miraculous powers have ceased, yet are there spiritual influences, by which the agency of the Holy Spirit is no less displayed. What if we saw, "in the whole valley of vision, the dead bones resume their former vitality, and rise upon the earth a large army," would that not display the operation of a divine power[u]? Behold, such a witness for the Lord is every soul that is "quickened from its death in trespasses and sins[x]." Not less power is exerted in the recovery of every apostate soul, than in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and his investiture with divine authority over all the principalities and powers both of heaven and hell[y]. Be ye then, my brethren, witnesses for the Lord, by shewing forth the power of his grace[z], and bringing forth in rich abundance the fruits of his Spirit[a]. Especially bear about in you a resemblance to the Lord Jesus Christ, in all his holy tempers and dispositions under his unparalleled afflictions; and then "the life of that blessed Saviour will be made manifest in your bodies[b]." Be ye "planted in the likeness of his death and resurrection;" and ye will be witnesses for him, that he is possessed of all power in heaven and in earth, and that in due season every enemy shall be put under his feet.]

[t] Rom. viii. 9. [u] Ezek. xxxvii. 1—10. [x] Eph. ii. 1.
[y] Eph. i. 19—25. [z] 1 Pet. ii. 9. [a] Gal. v. 22—24.
[b] 2 Cor. iv. 11.

OUTLINE NO. 1738

JESUS IS THE CHRIST.

Acts ii. 36. *Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*

WHEN we consider the advantages possessed by the Apostles, we are astonished to find how slow of heart they were to receive and understand the great mystery of the Gospel salvation. Not only before the death of their Lord, but after his resurrection,

yea, and after all his appearances to them, and the fresh instructions given them during the space of forty days, they could not divest themselves of the idea of a temporal kingdom. Not an hour before his ascension to heaven, they asked him, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" But from the day of Pentecost there was no more of doubt upon their minds respecting any fundamental point of our religion. For some years indeed they retained their prejudices about the Gentiles, not conceiving that they were to be admitted to a full participation of the blessings of the Gospel: but, respecting Christ, and his salvation, they were fully instructed, and never spake but with the most unshaken confidence. This appears from the very first sermon which was delivered by any one of them. St. Peter argued with as strong a persuasion of mind as he possessed at any future period; and without hesitation affirmed, in the presence of thousands of his countrymen, that Jesus, even the very person whom they had crucified, was indeed the Christ, the true Messiah[a].

His words are evidently the close of an argument: and, as they are delivered with peculiar confidence, it will be proper to consider,

I. The force of his reasoning—

Our Lord, according to his promise, had poured out the Spirit in a visible manner on his Disciples, whereby they were enabled to speak a great variety of languages, which gift was emblematically represented by the appearance of cloven tongues, as of fire. The circumstance of their immediately addressing all persons in their native tongues, excited the greatest astonishment: but those who understood not the particular language which they spake, represented them as in a state of intoxication. In vindication of himself and his associates, the Apostle justly observes, that such an imputation was absurd, since none but

[a] The order of the words in the Greek makes the expression very emphatical.

the most abandoned of men could have been drinking to intoxication so early as nine o'clock in the morning, and *that* upon a solemn feast-day, when they were about to worship God in his temple; and then proceeds to argue with them respecting the Messiahship of Christ, as proved by this event. He states,

1. That this miraculous gift was foretold by the Prophet Joel, as to be conferred by the Messiah—

[The passage cited from the prophet Joel undoubtedly refers to the times of the Messiah[b]. Previous to that time the Holy Spirit had been given only in a very partial way to a few: but, when Christ should be glorified, he was to be poured out, as it were, upon multitudes, both of men and women, that by his miraculous operations he might testify of Christ, and by his efficacious grace he might bring men to Christ.

After this should have been done for a space of time sufficient to evince the distinguished kindness of God towards his ancient people, and their incorrigible obstinacy towards him, God would give them signs of a very different kind; even such terrible signs, as should be like "turning the sun into darkness, and the moon into blood;" and then should destruction come upon them to the uttermost: but as, *previously to* that period, all who should believe in Christ should be saved from the condemnation in which all others would be involved, so, *at* that period, all his believing people should escape the miseries which would overwhelm the residue of that devoted nation.

This was the plain meaning of the prophecy, which at this time began to be fulfilled; and which in due season should receive a perfect accomplishment.]

2. That this gift was actually conferred by Jesus—

[It was known to all of them, that Jesus, during his ministry on earth, had wrought innumerable miracles in confirmation of his word and doctrine: and though the nation had put him to an ignominious death, yet had God raised him from the dead, and empowered him to send forth the Spirit in the manner he had done.

With respect to the truth of his resurrection, it had been foretold in terms that could be applicable to him alone[c]. It could not be of himself that David spake those words; for *he* did die, and see corruption; and his tomb remained even to the Apostles' days: but *Jesus* saw no corruption: *his* soul was not left in the place of departed spirits, nor was *his* body

[b] Compare ver. 16—21. with Joel ii. 28—32.
[c] Compare ver. 23—28. with Ps. xvi. 8—11.

permitted to continue in the grave long enough to undergo any change: he rose on the third day, as all his Disciples could testify, because they had themselves seen him on that day, and occasionally conversed familiarly with him for forty days afterwards, even to the very hour when in their presence he ascended up to heaven. Moreover he had expressly told them that he would send down the Holy Ghost upon them, in the manner he had done: and therefore it must be HE, and none other but HE, that had wrought the miracles which they now saw and heard[d].

If they should still be inclined to think that *David* had had any concern in this miracle, the Apostle called their attention to another prophecy of his, wherein David himself declared, that the person who should be thus invested with power at the right hand of God, was his LORD; and that the person so exalted, should "make all his foes his footstool[e]."

It was evident therefore, that, as the Messiah was to rise from the dead, and ascend up to heaven for the purpose of establishing his kingdom upon earth; and as Jesus had risen and ascended agreeably to those predictions; there could be no doubt but that it was HE who had now sent down the Spirit, according to the promise which he had given them. He had told them, but a few days before, that he would send forth upon them the promise of the Father, and baptize them with the Holy Ghost[f]; and he had now done it in a way which commended itself to the eyes and ears of all the people.]

3. That therefore Jesus must unquestionably be the true Messiah—

[It was not in the power of any creature to work the miracles now wrought: nor would the Father work them in order to confirm the claims of an impostor. They must of necessity therefore have been wrought by Jesus, who had thereby proved himself the true Messiah.

On these grounds Peter declared to them, that, as they could not doubt the existence of those prophecies, or the application of them to the Messiah, or the miracle now wrought by Jesus in confirmation of his claim to that office, "the whole house of Israel might know assuredly, that God had made that very Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ."]

Such was the Apostle's reasoning: and from the confident manner in which he expressed himself, we are led to notice,

[d] ver. 29—33.

[e] Compare ver. 34, 35. with Ps cx. 1.

[f] Acts i. 4, 5.

II. The importance of his conclusion—

If God has constituted Jesus both Lord and Christ, then we may know assuredly,

1. That Christ is our only Lord and Saviour—

[The force of this was felt by Peter's audience, insomuch that three thousand of them instantly obeyed the heavenly mandate, and surrendered up themselves to be saved and governed by him alone. Precisely in this manner must we devote ourselves to him: we must not be contented with "calling him Lord, Lord," but must feel the same need of him as they did, and cast ourselves upon him for mercy, and consecrate ourselves entirely to his service[g]. We must admit no other ground of hope but his obedience unto death — — — we must suffer no "other Lord to have dominion over us:" — — — but, having been bought by him with his most precious blood, we must "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his."]

2. That he is an all-sufficient Saviour—

[Whatever we can want, he is exalted to bestow. Do we need forgiveness of sins? He is empowered to grant it. Do we need repentance? He can impart that also. This we are assured of, on the testimony of Peter and all the other Apostles. What joyful tidings are these! Hear them, all ye who are labouring under a sense of guilt; and know, that "the blood of Jesus Christ is able to cleanse you from all sin:" — — — and ye, who mourn on account of the hardness of your hearts, know that he can "take away the heart of stone, and give you an heart of flesh" — — — If God the Father has constituted him "Head over all things to the Church," you need not fear, but that there shall be found in his fulness an ample supply for all your necessities[h] — — —]

3. That none shall ever look to him in vain—

["Him that cometh unto me," says Christ, "I will in no wise cast out" What then have we to do with desponding thoughts? Has God thus exalted his Son, and will he disappoint those who trust in him? No: it cannot be: "he never did," nor ever will, "say to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye my face in vain." Did the vilest person in the universe only desire mercy as much as God delights to exercise it, he would in one instant be purged from all his sin — — — We need only look to the effect of Peter's sermon on the murderous

[g] ver. 37, 38.

[h] St. Paul pursues the same line of argument as St. Peter, and founds upon it this consolatory truth. Acts xiii. 35—39. See also Heb. vii. 25.

Jews, and we shall see a perfect pattern of what God is ready to do for us, the very instant we believe in Jesus — — — "Know this," my brethren; know it "every one of you;" know it "most assuredly;" know it for your inexpressible comfort: and may God make this another Pentecost to our souls, for his mercy's sake! Amen.]

OUTLINE NO. 1739

REPENTANCE EXEMPLIFIED IN THE FIRST CONVERTS.

Acts ii. 37—39. *Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*

THE doctrine of a crucified Saviour is that which God has exclusively honoured in converting sinners to himself. The terrors of Mount Sinai are often used by him to awaken men from their slumbers; but it is "the law of faith," as published from Mount Zion, that alone captivates the souls of men. It was this, which, when exhibited in types and shadows, overcame the saints under the Jewish dispensation: and no sooner was it plainly preached by the Apostles, than thousands yielded to its all-powerful influence. The manner in which it operated we may see in the text. St. Peter had charged home upon his hearers the guilt of crucifying the Lord Jesus; and had declared that God had exalted that very Jesus to be the Sovereign "Lord" of all, and to be the "Christ," the anointed Saviour of the world[a]. Instantly was a wonderful effect produced on the whole assembly: in order to illustrate which, we shall notice,

I. The penitent's inquiry—

In the question which these first converts put each to the Apostle who stood nearest to him, we may observe,

[a] ver. 36.

1. Deep contrition—

[They were "pricked to the heart" with a sense of all their sins, and especially the sin of crucifying the Lord Jesus. And we also must be humbled in like manner; seeing that our sins were *the procuring cause* of Christ's death[b]; yea, and we have crucified him afresh ten thousand times by our continuance in sin[c].]

2. Extreme earnestness—

[Nothing lay so near their hearts, as to obtain the knowledge of salvation. Thus must we also feel our whole souls engaged in this great concern.]

3. A determination to comply with God's terms, whatever they should be—

[This is one of the strongest and most unequivocal marks of true penitence. And it must shew itself in us, as well as in them. We must not dispute about the terms, as *too humiliating*, or *too strict*, but be willing to be saved on the conditions prescribed in the Gospel.]

4. A respectful regard for those whom they once hated for their attachment to Christ—

[The Apostles had addressed them in these respectful and affectionate terms, "Men and Brethren." They now, in their turn, use the same language towards the Apostles; though but one hour before, no words would have been too harsh to use in invectives against them. Thus must our hearts also be turned towards the ministers and the Disciples of Christ, however much we may have before hated and despised them. Nor are our inquiries after salvation such as they ought to be, if they be not accompanied with *all* these marks of penitence and contrition.]

This inquiry was not in vain, as we may see from,

II. God's answer to it—

The reply given by God's ambassador, contains,

1. A plain direction—

[The term "repent" imports in this place *a change of mind*[d]: and it refers to their former apprehensions of Christ: they had lately crucified him as an impostor; now they must be persuaded that he was the true Messiah; yea, they must rely on his death as an atonement offered for them, and seek the remission of their sins through him alone: they must moreover "be baptized in his name," and become his avowed, his faithful Disciples.

[b] Isai. liii. 4, 5. [c] Heb. vi. 4—6. [d] μετανοήσατε

Such is the direction given to every one of us. We have scarcely thought Christ at all worthy of our regard; now he must be "precious to us," "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely."

We must renounce every self-righteous method of seeking acceptance with God, and believe in him for the remission of our sins.

We need not indeed be baptized again; but we must do that which was implied in this part of the direction: we must give up ourselves to Christ in a perpetual covenant; we must join ourselves to his Church and people; we must confess him openly in the midst of a persecuting and ungodly world.]

2. A rich encouragement—

[The Apostle told them, that "they should receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." We do not apprehend that this promise extended solely, or even primarily, to the miraculous powers with which the Apostles were invested; for it was made to all believers who should ever be called into the Church of God: we apprehend it referred chiefly to those sanctifying and saving operations of the Spirit which are necessary for all people in every age. All need the Holy Spirit to instruct and guide them into all truth, to strengthen them for their spiritual warfare, to comfort them under their afflictions, to renew them after the Divine image, and to make them "meet for their heavenly inheritance:" and for these ends and purposes did the Apostle engage that they should experience his operations.

He assured them that the promise of the Spirit for these ends and purposes was given to *all* who should believe in Christ. Accordingly we find that that promise was made[e]; that it was a part of the covenant of grace[f]; and that Jesus Christ himself referred to it *as made in the Old Testament*, and *as to be fulfilled under the Christian dispensation*, to *all who should believe in him*[g]: and St. Paul also mentions it as included in the promise made to Abraham, to be purchased by Christ for his believing seed, and to be conferred upon them all without distinction[h].

What further encouragement could they need? Were they guilty? the blood of Christ would cleanse them? Were they polluted? the Holy Ghost would sanctify them: he would come and dwell in them as in his temples, and perfect in them the good work that was now begun. The same promise is now made to us; and shall be fulfilled to all who seek for mercy through Christ alone — — —]

APPLICATION—

[e] Isai. xliv. 3.
[f] Isai. lix. 21.
[g] John vii. 37—39.
[h] Gal. iii. 14.

[Some possibly may be led to question whether this subject be properly addressed to *them:* since, having never crucified Christ, as the Jews did, they need not "repent;" and having been "baptized in the name of Christ," they have "received the remission of their sins," and "the gift of the Holy Ghost:" they have also been taught in their catechism, "What they must do to be saved;" and therefore need not, like those in our text, to make that inquiry.

But who amongst us has not "crucified the Son of God afresh," by a continuance in sin? Who has not, in numberless instances, done what he ought not, and left undone what he ought to have done? Consequently, *we* need to repent as much as *they* — — — and need also, as much as they, to apply to Christ for the remission of our sins — — — Moreover, let any man look at his indwelling corruptions, and say, whether he do not need the influences of the Spirit, to mortify and subdue them: let him also look at his duties, and say, whether he do not need the Spirit to strengthen him for a more suitable performance of them — — — Brethren, the name of Christians, or a form of godliness, will profit us little. Religion must be taken up by us, as it was by those Jews, as a matter of infinite importance, and of indispensable necessity. Like them we must be humbled; like them must we flee to Christ for mercy: like them must we become his faithful followers. Let all of us then "look to Him, as pierced" for our sins; and expect from him that divine Comforter, who "shall teach us all things, and work in us as effectually for our salvation, as he wrought in Christ for his exaltation to glory[i]."]

[i] Eph. i. 19—21.

OUTLINE NO. 1740

SEPARATION FROM THE UNGODLY RECOMMENDED.

Acts ii. 40. *And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.*

IT is in many respects a great advantage to us that we have the Holy Scriptures comprised in so small a space: for if they had been very voluminous, they would have been far less accessible to the poor, and few even of the rich would have found leisure or inclination to peruse them. One cannot however but feel a kind of regret that some particular parts have

not been more copiously transmitted to us. What an inestimable treasure, for instance, should we have possessed, if the whole of our Lord's discourse with the two Disciples in their way to Emmaus had been preserved[a]! So it would, doubtless, have been a rich feast to our souls, if every part of Peter's first sermon, whereby three thousand sinners were converted to God, had been recorded. But we must be contented to gather up the fragments which are left us in the inspired volume, and study with the more diligence those records which God has deemed sufficient for us. The substance of the Apostle's sermon we have in the foregoing context; and the application of it, in the words of our text. It is with the latter that we are at present concerned: and for a just improvement of it, we shall consider,

I. His testimony—

We cannot doubt but that "he *testified*" of Christ as the true Messiah, and shewed from the Scriptures that his death and resurrection were the means which God had appointed for the salvation of a ruined world. But it is evident, that, as he testified *for Christ*, so he testified *against that generation*, whom he reproved as an "untoward generation." But what ground was there for ascribing to them this character? Surely there was abundant reason for the appellation, even though it had been still more severe: for they were,

1. An impenitent generation—

[John the Baptist, our Lord himself, and all his Apostles, had, for the space of four years, preached among them, saying, "*Repent*, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand[b]." Yet, like their forefathers, they would not hear[c]. They were even more obdurate than the heathen: for the Ninevites had repented at the preaching of Jonas; and even the Sodomites themselves would have repented, had they heard such preaching as our Lord's; but the people of that generation would "not regard the voice of the charmer, though he charmed them never so wisely[d]." They were satisfied with their descent from

[a] Luke xxiv. 27. [b] Matt. iii. 2. Mark i. 15. and vi. 12.
[c] Jer. vii. 23, 24. Zech. vii. 11, 12.
[d] Matt. xi. 20. xii. 41. and Ps. lviii. 5.

Abraham, and thought that their relation to him was a certain pledge of their acceptance with God[e]. These things were subjects of complaint against them, and strongly characterized the people at large[f].

And do we see here no resemblance to the present generation? The people of this land have thousands of monitors, who call them to repentance: yet whom do we see smiting on their breasts and imploring mercy? Who calls himself to account, "saying, What have I done?" "Who asks, Where is God, my Maker?" Because we are *called* Christians, we imagine ourselves to *be* Christians, even though *we could not mention one single particular wherein we resemble Christ.* All that die are, as a matter of course, supposed to go to heaven, even though they never took one step in the way that leads thither. Say then, whether the appellation given to *them*, be not suitable to *us* also?]

2. An unbelieving generation—

[The Scriptures were publicly read and expounded in their synagogues every Sabbath-day. To them also our blessed Lord appealed as testifying of him[g]: and he confirmed his word with miracles unnumbered. Yet did the whole nation, except a few individuals, reject him: so that the complaint which had many hundred years before been uttered against them by the prophet, was abundantly verified[h]—

Would to God there were less occasion to involve the present generation also in the same condemnation! We have the Scriptures, which are appealed to by every faithful minister of Christ. But who believes what we say? Who believes the necessity of conversion to God? Who believes, that, "unless he be born again he can never enter into the kingdom of God?" and that "without real, universal holiness, no man can see the Lord?" That men *profess* to believe these things, we acknowledge: but who follows after the attainment of them, and evinces the sincerity of his faith by the earnestness of his exertions? A little gleaning of believers may be found; but the harvest is borne away by unbelief.]

3. A persecuting generation—

[In every age the Jews had persecuted their prophets unto death: and that generation filled up the measure of their fathers' iniquities, by "crucifying the Lord of Glory." Against the Apostles also they raged with insatiable fury, and against all that called upon the name of Christ.

[e] Matt. iii. 8, 9. John viii. 33—41. [f] Matt. xxi. 31, 32.
[g] John v. 39.
[h] Isai. liii. 1. with John xii. 38. and Rom. x. 16.

It is true, we do not, in this age, see crosses erected, and fires kindled, for the destruction of the Lord's people: but has persecution ceased? Is not a life of real godliness still hated by the world? Does it not invariably become an object of reproach; and do not the opprobrious names given to religious people lower them in the estimation of others, insomuch that all their good qualities are lost sight of, and they are deemed worthy only of pity and contempt? No thanks to the world, then, that fires are not kindled as much as ever: it is to our laws, and to the providence of our God, we owe it, that bounds are prescribed, beyond which the enmity of men is no longer suffered to exert itself. But it is still as true as ever, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution[1]."]

But let us pass on to,

II. His exhortation—

St. Peter well knew, that all who retained their enmity against God and his Christ, must soon perish: he therefore exhorted his hearers to save themselves from the impending ruin. The same exhortation befits us also. Is it asked, How are we to save ourselves from this untoward generation?

We ANSWER,

1. Renounce their ways—

[Judge ye, Whither such ways must lead. Need you be told, that, "except ye repent, ye must all perish;" or, that, "if ye believe not, ye cannot see life, but the wrath of God abideth on you;" or, that all who make Christ "a stumbling-stone, will be broken in pieces?" Deceive not yourselves: think not that the number of your associates will afford you any security: *numbers* did not protect the inhabitants of the plain, or the antediluvian world; nor shall you find the termination of the broad road any other than you have been forewarned concerning it. Of this you may rest assured, that "whatsoever you sow, you shall also reap: if you sow to the flesh, you shall, of the flesh, reap corruption: you must sow to the Spirit, if you would, of the Spirit, reap life everlasting."]

2. Forsake their company—

[We know that you cannot entirely separate from the ungodly; for then, as the Apostle says, "you must needs go out of the world." But you are not to choose them as your companions; for, "what communion hath light with darkness,

[1] 2 Tim. iii. 12.

and Christ with Belial?" It is not sufficient that you "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness; you must also reprove them[k]." Need you be told what even a heathen writer could declare, that "evil communications corrupt good manners[l]?" Do you not know, that men insensibly imbibe the spirit of their associates; and that you must "come out from Babylon, if you would not be partakers of her sins and of her plagues[m]?" Know assuredly, that "a companion of fools will be destroyed[n];" and that, if you belong to Christ, "you will not be of the world, even as he was not of the world[o]." I say to you, therefore, in the words of the great Apostle, "Come out from among them, and be separate; and touch not the unclean thing; and I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty[p]."]

3. Devote yourselves entirely to the Lord—

[The conduct of those whom the Apostle addressed, will form the best comment on his exhortation. His converts instantly applied to Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, and devoted themselves unreservedly to his service: and from that day "continued in the Apostles' fellowship," (not the fellowship of their former companions,) and in the unremitted exercise of piety and love[q]. We say not that you are to neglect your worldly callings; (nothing can be further from our wishes, or from your duty than this:) but you must begin from this time to "live no longer to yourselves, but unto him who died for you, and rose again." "Instead of being any longer conformed to this world, you must be transformed in the renewing of your minds, proving what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." To all of you then I say, Save yourselves in this manner: escape thus from the contagion and ruin of this untoward generation. Give yourselves up to God, as your reconciled God in Christ Jesus: do it without fear——do it without reserve——do it without delay——Then, when the impenitent and unbelieving part of this generation shall eat the bitter fruit of their doings, you shall be numbered with "the generation of the righteous," even of them that sought and served their God[r].]

[k] Eph. v. 11.
[l] 1 Cor. xv. 33. This is a quotation from Menander.
[m] Rev. xviii. 4. [n] Prov. xiii. 20. [o] John xvii. 16.
[p] 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. [q] ver. 41—47.
[r] Ps. xiv. 5. and xxiv. 6. and cxii. 2.

OUTLINE NO. 1741

THE STATE OF THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS.

Acts ii. 44—47. *And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.*

THE true nature of Christianity would be very imperfectly discovered by any one who should look for it in the conduct of the Christian world. The generality of those who name the name of Christ, differ but little from those who never heard of his name. And even among those who profess a regard for religion, there is but a small measure of that spirit which may be discerned among the early converts. In the Churches of this day will be found a form of godliness, but very little of its power. We must go to the Scriptures, and to the accounts given us of the first Christians, to see what vital religion is. There we behold it in all its purity. Let us contemplate it as exhibited by those who were converted on the day of Pentecost. In our text we may behold,

I. Their charity—

This was more extensive than any that can be found on record in the annals of the world. A few individuals perhaps may be found, who have evinced an unbounded love towards those who had long been connected with them in the ties of friendship: but here the whole body of believers were animated by the same spirit towards each other, even towards those whom they had never so much as seen till that hour: all were divested of every selfish feeling, and sacrificed their own personal interests for the good of the whole.

But here arises an important question; "Is their conduct in this particular a model for our imitation?" I answer,

We certainly are not called to perform the same specific *act*—

[*That act arose out of the circumstances of the Church at that time.* Some indeed have suggested, that they acted thus from an assured expectation that either they should be speedily dispossessed of their property by the violence of persecution, or that they should ere long suffer the loss of it in the general destruction of the Jewish polity. But such an idea as this divests their conduct of all its excellence; since it would have been no virtue at all to sell what they knew would soon be taken from them, and to give away what they could not retain. They proceeded on far different grounds from these. Of the multitude who were converted, great numbers came from a distance to the feast, not expecting to continue at Jerusalem more than a few days: but now that they were led to just views of Christianity, they would on no account lose the opportunities they enjoyed of obtaining further instruction from their inspired teachers: of course therefore, unless assisted by others, they must be left destitute of necessary food: and, if necessitated to depend on others who were enemies to this new religion, they could expect but little aid, and would therefore be under a strong temptation to renounce Christianity as soon as they had embraced it. Besides, of those who lived at Jerusalem, many would probably become objects of virulent persecution, so as to be deprived of all that they possessed; and therefore that none might be reduced to abject want, the whole body formed one common stock for the supply of all; the richer making their abundance a supply for the necessities of the more indigent[a]. This however was perfectly voluntary on their part; for St. Peter told Ananias that he was under no obligation to part with his property[b]; and the whole tenour of Scripture supposes that there must be different ranks and orders of men, who are called to the performance of distinct and appropriate duties[c].]

But the *principle* from which they acted is of universal and unalterable obligation—

[Love was the principle by which they were actuated: and it is characteristic of love, that "it seeketh not its own[d]:" it puts off selfishness, and seeks its happiness in contributing to the happiness of others. A person under the influence of this principle considers all that he possesses as belonging to God, and as a talent with which he is entrusted for the benefit of mankind. Hence he is "glad to distribute, and willing to

[a] Compare Acts iv. 32, 34, 35. [b] Acts v. 4.

[c] The command given to the Rich Youth was also peculiar to *him*. Luke xviii. 22.

[d] 1 Cor. xiii. 5.

communicate," whenever a just occasion for liberality presents itself, and "especially towards the household of faith:" and if the particular circumstances of the Church call for such a sacrifice, he is ready, as far as the occasion requires it, to comply *literally* with that command of Christ, "Sell that ye have, and give alms;" for whatever treasure he may possess on earth, his chief desire is to "have treasure in heaven[e]." True indeed it is, that there are not many who, like the Macedonians, "give according to their power, yea and beyond their power[f];" and fewer still who, like the poor widow, give their last mite unto the Lord: in too many instances there is rather reason to complain with St. Paul, that "all men seek their own, and not the things of Jesus Christ:" but still the injunction, "Seek not every man his own, but every man another's wealth," is as much in force as ever; and we ought, if called to it, to "lay down," not our property only, but even "our own lives for the brethren."]

Of an equally exalted kind was,

II. Their piety—

They gave up themselves wholly, as it were, to the exercises of religion. But here the same question, as before, recurs; How far was their conduct in this respect a model for our imitation? And the same answer must be returned to it:

We are not called to follow them in *the act*—

[The occasion was so peculiar, as to justify, and even require, a peculiar mode of acting. Our circumstances are extremely different from theirs. We have duties which cannot be neglected, without great injury to society, and dishonour to God: and, if every one, from the moment that he became religious, were to lay aside all his worldly business, he would place in the way of the ungodly such a stumbling-block as would prove almost subversive of Christianity itself. "To do our own business," and "not to be slothful in business, are as much commanded, as to "be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." We therefore cannot be called to such a line of conduct as is incompatible with the discharge of all our social duties.]

But *in principle* we must resemble them—

[They gave themselves up wholly unto God: and so "must it also be our meat and drink to do the will of our heavenly Father." We must "love him with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength;" and "yield up to him our

[e] Luke xii. 33, 34. [f] 2 Cor. viii. 3, 4.

bodies and our souls a living sacrifice," and "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his." Whatever be our calling in life, there can be no reason why we should not "delight ourselves in God," and "live, not to ourselves, but unto him that died for us and rose again." Why should not every one of us have the same frame of mind as David, whose duties must certainly have been as numerous and important as any that we are called to perform[g]? We cannot, as has before been observed, be constantly *engaged in* religious duties; but we may have our hearts always disposed for the enjoyment of them[h]: and it is certainly incumbent on us to embrace all seasonable opportunities of waiting upon God in the Church, and at his table, and in our families and the closet. Our daily intercourse with our friends should also be improved for the advancement of true religion, and every returning meal should afford us an occasion of enjoying and glorifying our heavenly Benefactor[i]. It is our privilege, as much as that of the primitive Christians, to "eat our meat with gladness and singleness of heart, blessing and praising God."]

With such knowledge of their conduct we may expect to hear of,

III. Their increase—

Their conduct conciliated the regard of all the people—

[Doubtless the natural man hates the light, because the evil of his own ways is exposed by it. Yet there is something in true religion which approves its excellence, even to the very people who hate it. Herod, from a full conviction that "John was a just and holy man, feared him," and complied with his advice in many particulars; though afterwards he imprisoned him and put him to death. Thus the wonderful change that was wrought upon the first converts, from selfishness to charity, and from irreligion to the most exalted piety, excited the admiration and the love of all.

How blessed is it, where the conduct of professors is so exemplary, as "to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," and to engage the esteem of those who are condemned by it! We must not indeed expect always to *secure* the favour of men; but we should endeavour so to act as to *deserve* it.]

Their numbers also were increased from day to day—

[Doubtless conversion is the fruit of divine grace alone: "Whether Paul plant, or Apollos water, it is God alone that

[g] Ps. lxiii. 1—5. and lxxxiv. 1—4, 10.
[h] 1 Thess. v. 16—18. [i] 1 John i. 3.

can give the increase." Yet God uses various means to accomplish this work; and one of peculiar efficacy is, the conduct of his people: by that he "puts to silence the ignorance of foolish men," and constrains them to "glorify him in the day of visitation." It is highly probable that the exalted piety and unbounded charity of the first converts were greatly instrumental to the conversion of those around them. Every one of them was a preacher in his own house, by his actions at least, if not by words. And O! what might not be hoped for, if all who profess religion, breathed the spirit that displayed itself at that period of the Church? Truly, many might be awakened to a concern for their souls, and be constrained to say, "We will go with you; for we perceive that God is with you of a truth." Let this be borne in mind, as an incentive to a continual progress in holiness; and let us strive "so to make our light shine before men, that others, beholding our good works, may glorify our Father which is in heaven."]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. At what a low ebb religion is amongst us!

[If we compare our attainments with those recorded in our text, what reason shall we see to blush and be ashamed! How has selfishness triumphed over charity, and lukewarmness assumed the place of piety! But let us not imagine that religion is different now from what it was in that day. Some difference in our mode of exercising religion may justly be admitted: but in our spirit there should be no difference at all: God is the same gracious God as ever; his Gospel is as worthy of all acceptation as ever; and the blessings we receive by means of it are as great as ever: and therefore we ought to feel its power and evince its efficacy, as much as others have done at any period of the Church. Let us then set this example before our eyes, and endeavour to walk even as they walked.]

2. How we may be instrumental to the increase of the Church—

[Much may be done, very much, by every member of the Church of Christ. The influence of a bright example is still as great as ever. As any instance of misconduct in professors hardens others against the truth, so the beauty of holiness exhibited by them has a powerful tendency to win the souls of adversaries. If, on the one hand, by an uncharitable or irreligious deportment, we may "destroy many souls for whom Christ died," so, by a life becoming the Gospel, we may "win many who never would have obeyed the preached word." Let us then attend to our conduct in every state and circumstance

of life: let us look well to the whole of our spirit and temper, that we may not even in the smallest matter "cause the enemy to speak reproachfully," but rather may "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."]

OUTLINE NO. 1742

THE CRIPPLE HEALED.

Acts iii. 6—8. *Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ancle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.*

IT is justly said, that "we know not what a day or an hour may bring forth." Nothing under heaven was further from the expectations of this poor cripple, or of the friends who brought him to "the beautiful gate of the temple," than that he should obtain such a mercy as that which was now vouchsafed unto him. Possibly he might hope to receive some larger donation than any he had ever yet been favoured with; but, to obtain a perfect cure of his malady, with all the attendant benefits of it to his body and his soul, he had not the slightest hope. Nor indeed had Peter and John any thoughts of conferring such a benefit, till God, by his Spirit, put it into their hearts to impart it. But the miracle here wrought is of standing use to the Church in all ages. We see in it,

I. A divine attestation to the Messiahship of Jesus—

For this end it was wrought by the Apostles—

[When they were first sent forth by our Lord, soon after the commencement of their call to his service, he gave them this command: "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give[a]." The same command was in force during the whole of their ministry; because it was by working miracles that they were to convince men that they were messengers from the Most High[b], who alone could so confirm their word, or give such testimony to

[a] Matt. x. 8. [b] John xiv. 12. Mark xvi. 17, 18.

the truths they proclaimed. In the miracle now wrought, they did not merely think of conferring a boon, as if they had given to the man a piece of silver or of gold. Of such gifts they had none to bestow: but an infinitely higher gift, which not all the silver and gold in the universe could purchase, they were empowered to bestow, for the purpose of leading his mind, and the minds of the nation at large, to the Lord Jesus. The very words, by which they conveyed the blessing, shewed this: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." And when the spectators of the miracle were struck with admiration of *them*, as the authors of it, they utterly disclaimed all honour arising from it, as though they had either wrought it by their own power, or merited it at the hands of God by their own holiness: they declare that God himself had wrought it, for the purpose of "glorifying his Son Jesus," whom the Jews had so lately crucified, but whom he had raised from the dead, and whom all the prophets had referred to as the Prophet like unto Moses, that was to be received by them at the peril of their souls[c]. Thus the Apostles themselves appeal to the miracle, as demonstrative of Christ's Messiahship: "His name, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know; yea, the faith that is in him hath given him this perfect soundness, in the presence of you all[d]." In the miracle there were two things which must carry conviction to every dispassionate mind; namely, the suddenness, and the perfection of it. No natural means could have effected the cure so instantaneously; nor, considering that he had been a cripple from his birth, and was now forty years of age, could the cure have been so effected as to leave no measure of weakness and languor in the person healed. But here he, in the first instance, shewed himself as strong and vigorous as if he had never been diseased at all: from whence it was evident that God had wrought it in the name of Jesus Christ, and had by this act set his seal to the truth of Christ's Messiahship.]

2. In this light it was regarded by the enemies of our Lord—

[They had long known the man; and seeing him now, a totally altered man, present in the midst of them, they knew what conviction the miracle must carry to the minds of all. Reduced to great difficulties, they thus argued amongst themselves: "What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them, is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But, that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this

[c] ver. 12—15. [d] ver. 16.

name[e]." Here it is clear that they thought the evidence arising from this miracle fully conclusive; and that, if those who had wrought it were suffered to testify of Jesus, they must carry all before them. At the raising of Lazarus by our blessed Lord, the chief priests and elders argued, "If we let the man (Jesus) alone, all men will believe on him:" so did the elders at this time, in reference to the Apostles; "If we do not silence them, they will soon fill the whole land with their doctrine, and establish on an immoveable basis the faith they profess."]

Thus clear was it, as an attestation to Christ's Messiahship. But it was also,

II. A characteristic emblem of his salvation—

All the miracles shadowed forth some part of the Gospel salvation. But this gave a peculiarly instructive view of it. It shewed,

1. Its operation on the soul—

[In this view it was explained by the Apostles themselves: "Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name given under heaven whereby we can be saved." The import of which is simply this: 'You have seen how this man's body has been healed, even by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and it is in this way that your souls must be saved: for there is no other power that can effect such a change within you; a change from weakness to strength, from death to life[f].

Hence it appears that the state of this poor cripple exhibits a just view of every man that is born into the world. He from the very womb was incapable of those exertions for which the limbs were originally designed. And so it is with fallen man, in reference to the powers of his soul. He cannot walk before God as Adam did in Paradise, nor as God's saints and servants do even in their fallen state. But, by the name of Jesus Christ, who is there that may not be healed? Who is there, however deplorable his state, whom the power of Divine grace cannot renovate, so as to make him altogether a new creature? Can any thing be conceived more effectually changed than the converts on the day of Pentecost? From blood-thirsty lions, they at once became meek and patient

[e] Acts iv. 14—18. [f] Acts iv. 10, 12. with Acts iii. 26.

lambs. So it was with the jailer, who, but a few hours before had thrust Paul and Silas into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks, yet, at the instant of his conversion, administers to them with all the tenderness of the most endeared brother. Thus it is, wherever the grace of God is received in truth. There is "a new creation[g], a resurrection from the dead, like unto that which was effected in the Lord Jesus Christ, when he was raised from the dead, and exalted to the right hand of God, far above all the principalities and powers, whether of heaven or hell[h]." Great wonder was excited by the change wrought on this poor man; yet was that but a very faint shadow of what is wrought on all, by the converting grace of God, through faith in the name of Christ.]

2. Its effects upon the heart and life—

[See this man, when begging an alms of Peter and John, a poor miserable suppliant for the smallest dole of charity! Behold him, the very instant Peter stretched out the hand of faith and love to raise him up! See how upright he stands, how firmly he walks, how exultingly he leaps for joy! See him entering with his benefactors into the temple of the Lord, pouring forth his praises and thanksgivings to God for the astonishing mercy vouchsafed unto him! Nor will he let go his hold on those who had been the instruments of conveying this mercy to him. No: he would never lose sight of them more, if he could help it; so ardent was his gratitude, so abundant his love. Now, then, this shews what the healing grace of God effects in the heart of man. O the joy which a sense of God's pardoning love kindles in the soul! Once the man attended the house of God in a formal customary way, without any delight in the duties there performed: but now the ordinances of divine worship are sources of the sublimest enjoyment. His addresses to God now come from the heart: and he scarcely knows how to restrain his emotions; such a fire is kindled within him, and such exquisite joy stimulates his whole frame. And to the instruments of his conversion he feels a love altogether different from any which mere nature had ever excited in his bosom. St. Paul says of the Galatian converts, that "they would have even plucked out their own eyes, and have given them to him." The whole life and conversation is from that hour altogether changed. He begins to live, not to himself, as formerly, but unto God: and he desires to shew to the whole world what a Saviour Christ is; so that in his deportment they may have an undeniable evidence of the excellency and blessedness of the Gospel salvation.]

See then, brethren,

[g] 2 Cor. v. 17. [h] Eph. i. 19—21.

1. What it is *we* aim at in all our Ministrations—

[We find you all in the sad predicament of this poor cripple. But, because the weakness is in your souls, and not in your bodies, you are not conscious of it: whereas you may see in one moment, if you would candidly examine your state, that you have been, from your very birth, as destitute of all spiritual energy in your souls, as that poor man was of activity in the use of his limbs. And hither we see you brought, some perhaps by a formal regard to the habits of your country, and others by mere curiosity, and none of you expecting to receive more than some customary gratification: but we come (to work a miracle, shall I say?—*that* would be deemed presumptuous;—but we *do* come) to convey a benefit which not all the angels in heaven could confer, even the renovation of your souls in the name of Jesus Christ. We do say to you, and you, and you, "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, arise and walk;" and if only you can receive that word in faith, and look to the Lord Jesus Christ for his blessing, a healing operation shall go forth with the word, and salvation come to your souls this very day. It is thought by many, that we would make you melancholy. Yes, as melancholy as was that healed cripple in the first hour of his deliverance. Dear brethren, search the Scriptures, and see what the effects of the Gospel were in the days of old. And such they are at this hour; and we account not ourselves to have ministered it to any good effect, any further than we see realized in you the blessed miracle which has been this day set before your eyes. O that not only one or two of you might experience it this day, but all of you together; so that you might all be "filled with peace and joy in believing;" yea, and all be transported with a "joy that is unspeakable and glorified!"]

2. What it is that we expect from you, if ye "receive not the grace of God in vain"—

[We expect you no longer to continue the poor, low, grovelling creatures that ye have been; but to shew to all around you, that you are endued with power from on high, and enabled to "walk even as Christ himself walked." We expect you to shine as lights in the world: yea, the world itself expects this of you. If you profess to have experienced the converting grace of God, the world will ask you, and with reason too, "What do ye more than others?" And they should be made to see, that there is in divine grace an energy and a power, to which they are utter strangers; and an efficacy, for which they know not how to account. Dear brethren, ye must live above the world: ye must delight yourselves in God. Ye must not be afraid of man: nor, if man ridicule and revile

your devotion to God, must ye regard it as of the smallest moment. Gratitude to the Saviour must fill your souls. To him you must consecrate all the powers he has renewed; and the whole of your life must henceforth be devoted to the praise of his grace, and to the glory of his name. And never must you return to your former state. Think, I pray you, how the enemies of Christ would have triumphed, if this cripple had relapsed into his former state of impotence, and had again been necessitated to be carried, as before, to the temple-gate, to beg for alms. And will not the world triumph, if they ever behold you again returning to the state in which you were, previous to your reception of the Gospel? O! remember that the honour of your Lord and Saviour is bound up, as it were, in you and your conduct: if you walk uprightly, he will be glorified; but if you turn back, he will be dishonoured, and his very name be blasphemed. O! beg of God that you may never give occasion to the enemies of your Lord to speak reproachfully, but that, both in time and in eternity, you may be distinguished monuments of his power and grace.]

OUTLINE NO. 1743

CHRIST REJECTED.

Acts iii. 14, 15. *Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life.*

IN the Apostles of our Lord we behold an admirable mixture of wisdom and firmness. On no occasion did they withhold the truth from their most powerful opponents; and on no occasion did they excite needless prejudice, in their manner of declaring it. It was necessary that they should assert the honour of their Lord, by whose Almighty power they had been enabled to work a most stupendous miracle. But, in doing this, they would appear, to many, to be setting up the Lord Jesus against Moses, and to be detracting from the honour of Jehovah. To obviate this misconception, they profess at once the greatest reverence for the religion of their forefathers; and proclaim, that "the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob," had wrought this miracle for the express purpose of "glorifying his Son Jesus," whom

they had treated with all imaginable ignominy, "denying him in the presence of Pilate, and preferring a murderer before him." Here, you will perceive, whilst they are careful to give no needless offence, they boldly charge upon their hearers the guilt they had contracted in crucifying their Messiah. And somewhat of a similar charge must this day be brought against you, my brethren. But, that I may not overload you with too aggravated an accusation, I propose to shew,

I. How far the charge exhibited against the Jews attaches to us—

Against the Lord Jesus Christ *personally* it is impossible that we should ever have committed any offence; because he has never corporeally been within our reach. The charge therefore, so far as relates to personal injury, must be confined to those amongst whom he sojourned in the days of his flesh. But against him, *as revealed in his Gospel*, we have shewn the same hostility as they. For,

1. We have refused to acknowledge him in his proper character—

[He professed himself to be the King, of whom the prophets had spoken[a], and whose kingdom the Jews themselves expected to be established in the midst of them[b]. But when Pilate announced him under that character, and offered to release him, they refused to acknowledge him, and demanded his crucifixion[c]. They had had abundant evidence that he was not only a just and holy person, but "the Just and Holy One[d]," the Son of the living God: yet they would not believe in him, or receive him as their King.

And have not we the same evidence of his character? Were not all his miracles sufficient proofs of his Messiahship? Yet, who amongst us has submitted himself to him? Who has not, in fact, said concerning him, "We will not have this man to reign over us[e]?" God has "sworn that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow[f]:" but who has obeyed his mandate? Many will superstitiously bow their heads at the mention of

[a] Ps. ii. 6. Dan. ii. 44. and vii. 13, 14. with John xviii. 33—37.
[b] Matt. ii. 2, 6, 11. and xxi. 4—9.
[c] Mark xv. 9, 12—14.
[d] Acts ii. 27. vii. 52. and xxii. 14.
[e] Luke xix. 14.
[f] Rom. xiv. 11.

the name of Jesus, in the Creed: but who will bow down their hearts before him? In that respect, the most of us, alas! are as stubborn and inflexible as stones or iron. Let us look back upon our past lives; and we shall see, that in no one respect have we truly taken his yoke upon us, and never for a single hour been truly obedient to his will.]

2. We have rejected him, with a scornful preference of our most deadly lusts—

[The Jews had the alternative given to them, to save Barabbas, or the Lord Jesus. But they, with one voice, cried out, "Not this man, but Barabbas:" thus deliberately preferring one who had destroyed life, to him who was "the Prince and Author of life" to a ruined world.

And have not we resembled them in this? The Lord Jesus Christ is still "the Prince of life;" possessing "life in, and of, himself[g];" and ready to confer life on all who seek it at his hands[h]. Yet whom have we chosen for our friends? Have not those who would destroy our souls, as well as their own, been sought by us as our counsellors and companions, rather than He who came down from heaven to seek and save us? Yea, we have preferred also our most deadly lusts before Him; and, rather than "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts[i]," we have, times without number, "crucified the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame[k]."

And let it not be thought that I speak here of open transgressors only: for the more sober and moral of mankind differ not a whit in this respect from those who are more openly licentious: for the hearts of all are alike alienated from the Lord Jesus; and all, without exception, agree in saying, "Let us break his bands asunder, and cast away his cords from us[l]."]

Let us then consider,

II. What the guilt we have contracted calls for at our hands—

The Apostle's address to his hearers is precisely that which befits our state also:

1. "Repent"—

[Well might the Jews, who had "crucified the Lord of glory," be called on to repent. But I think that this duty is yet more justly required at our hands: for the evidence which Jesus had given of his Messiahship, previous to his crucifixion, is not to be compared with that which his resurrection and ascension, and his sending of the Holy Spirit, have afforded

[g] John i. 4. and v. 26.
[h] John xi. 25, 26. and xvii. 2.
[i] Gal. v. 24.
[k] Heb. vi. 6.
[l] Ps. ii. 2, 3.

unto us. Besides, his mean appearance was to the nation at large a matter of offence, which they knew not how to reconcile with their expectations: whereas to us, who are able to compare it with the prophecies respecting him, it is a confirmation rather than a stumbling-block, a proof of his Messiahship rather than a ground of doubt and suspicion. The people at large were led by their superiors, and had but little opportunity of judging for themselves; but we can dispassionately view every part of Sacred Writ, and calmly judge between the prophecies and events. Moreover, *they* were apprehensive that, by receiving Jesus, they should be led to sacrifice their allegiance to Moses: but *we* profess not only to believe in Moses, but to have received the Lord Jesus also, and to be his disciples. We therefore, in denying the Lord Jesus, are more criminal than they; and, in preferring every base lust before him, are guilty of a conduct which calls for the deepest humiliation and contrition. To every one of you, therefore, I say, with the Apostle, "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness: humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, if ever you would that he should lift you up[m]."]

2. "Be converted"—

[Your sentiments and conduct respecting the Lord Jesus need to be changed, as much as ever those of the Jews did, whom the Apostle addressed. *Professedly*, indeed, you regard him as your Saviour; but *in practice* you "deny him," even as they did, and postpone his interests to those of the most depraved competitor. Let an entire change, then, be wrought in you, in relation to him. Confess him now; yea, confess him openly before the whole world; and receive him in that entire character which he bears in the Sacred Writings. Receive him as your Prophet, Priest, and King; and look for every thing from him, as your only Lord and Saviour — — — As for every person, and every thing, that would stand in competition with Him, let them all be sacrificed, without hesitation or exception; that He alone may live in your hearts, and be glorified in your lives. Bring forth your lusts, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," and crucify them all: let "the right hand be cut off, and the right eye be plucked out:" plead not for any one of them; nor listen to a plea, by whomsoever it may be preferred. Let the Lord Jesus Christ be to you your one Friend, your only Saviour, your "all in all."]

3. Expect from Christ all that your necessities can require—

[m] Jam. iv. 9, 10.

[The forgiveness of all your sins shall surely be accorded to you, the instant you believe in him. "Repent, and be converted," says the Apostle, "that your sins may be blotted out[n]." But this is only one part of the blessing which shall be vouchsafed to you. If you would see at once the full change that should be wrought in you, look to the man whose restoration to health was the occasion of this address: he had been "lame from the mother's womb," and incapable of moving himself from place to place; but, through the mercy vouchsafed to him in Jesus' name, he was so strengthened, that "he leaped up, and stood, and walked, and entered into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God[o]." And is not "the name of Jesus" now as operative as then? or has "faith in his name" lost any of its power[p]? I tell you, that though *miracles* shall not now be wrought upon your bodies, *wonders* shall still be accomplished on your souls; and not one atom of what was wrought in that man corporeally, shall be wanting in you spiritually, if only you will look to the Lord Jesus Christ as "the Prince of life." Yes, truly, "God has sent his Son to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities[q]:" and through the mighty working of his power shall you be raised to newness of life. The astonishment of all was excited by a view of that restored cripple: nor shall it be less drawn forth in reference to you: for your whole life shall testify the power of his grace; and in his temple above shall you adore and magnify his name to all eternity.]

[n] ver. 19. [o] ver. 6—8.

[p] "His name, through faith in his name, has made this man strong." ver. 16.

[q] ver. 26.

OUTLINE NO. 1744

REPENTANCE ENCOURAGED.

Acts iii. 19. *Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.*

REPENTANCE is thought, by many, to be a legal rather than an evangelical duty. But it belongs properly to the Gospel: and our chief encouragements to it are derived from the Gospel. The Forerunner of our Lord, and our Lord himself, exhorted men to it, from the consideration, that "the kingdom of

heaven was at hand[a]." The Apostles, too, considered it as enjoined on all[b]; and they preached it to all, without exception[c]. In considering the words before us, I shall not enter into any methodical discussion of them; but take them as they lie, and endeavour to impress upon your minds the duty contained in them.

"Repent," then, my beloved Brethren—

[That you all need repentance, you cannot doubt. If you had never transgressed the law of God but in one single instance, it would be necessary for you to repent of it; and much more when you have violated God's law every day and hour of your lives——— Call your ways to remembrance, in order to search out your multiplied transgressions; and confess them humbly to the Lord, saying, 'Thus and thus have I done'——— Let your sorrow for them be deep ——— It is "the broken and contrite heart alone which God will not despise." And flee to the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of them. No repentance can be genuine, if it be not accompanied with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; especially in those who hear the Gospel. If you have not such a sense of your guilt and helplessness as brings you to the foot of the cross, you cannot see them aright. The penitent under the law confessed his sins over his offering, and at the same time transferred them to the head of his victim: so will you transfer your own sins to Christ, if you know his willingness and sufficiency to save.]

"Be converted" also—

[Repentance is of no avail, if it stop short of this. There must be a thorough conversion of your souls to God. His will must be your will, and his glory the one end for which you live. Do not mistake, as though it were sufficient for you to be sorry for your sins. Your sorrow may arise, not from any hatred of sin itself, or any sense of the dishonour it has done to God, but simply from a dread of the punishment denounced against it. With your grief for past sin there must be blended a love of universal holiness, and an entire dedication of yourselves to God——— See to it, then, that this be found in you; and that you live henceforth entirely to Him who died for you and rose again———]

Then may you hope that "your sins shall be blotted out"—

[You shall certainly never turn to God in vain: for he has said, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous

[a] Matt. iii. 2. and iv. 17. [b] Acts xvi. 20.
[c] Acts xx. 21. and xxvi. 20.

man his thoughts; and let him turn unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Not that your repentance will wash away sin, or your conversion purchase heaven. It is the blood of Christ alone that can cleanse even from the smallest sin: but if, with a penitent and contrite heart, you turn unto him, your sins, how numerous soever they may have been, shall all be blotted out; and how heinous soever they may have been, they shall be made white as snow — — —]

And then shall "seasons of refreshing, also, come to you from the presence of your Lord"—

[This expression may refer to that season of joy which shall prevail over the earth, when the Messiah's reign shall be established upon it[d]. But I understand it rather as importing that peace and joy which shall flow into the soul of every true convert[e]. See the change wrought in the minds of the three thousand, on the day of Pentecost[f]. See the promise made to all who shall "truly believe in Christ[g]." This shall be your experience, if, with penitential sorrow, and in newness of heart and life, you turn unto the Lord. You shall be filled with a "peace that passeth all understanding," and "a joy that is unspeakable and glorified." No tongue can declare the blessedness of that soul which has "the light of God's countenance lifted up upon it," and "his love shed abroad within it" — — —]

Let me, then, once more say to every one of you, Repent deeply of all your sins, and seek, without delay, to be truly converted unto God—

[Without this there can be no remission of your sins: not one can ever be blotted out of the book of God's remembrance; but all will be brought forth against you in judgment, to the utter confusion and condemnation of your souls. And what season of refreshment, suppose you, will you ever experience? Have you any *now?* You know you have not. Will you have any in a dying hour? Alas! insensibility is the best that you can hope for then. And what will you have in the eternal world? Alas! not "a drop of water to cool your tongues." What I say, then, to one, I say to all, "Repent, and be converted, ere it be too late, and ere the wrath of God fall upon you to the uttermost.]

[d] Isai. lii. 9, 10. and lxvi. 10—13.
[e] See Doddridge on the place.
[f] Acts ii. [g] Isai. lxi. 1—3.

OUTLINE NO. 1745

MOSES AND CHRIST COMPARED IN THEIR PROPHETICAL OFFICE.

Acts iii. 22, 23. *Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.*

THERE are innumerable beauties in the Holy Scriptures, which escape the notice of the superficial observer, but which, when discovered, abundantly compensate all the labour that can attend the minutest investigation. Critics have bestowed much pains in searching out the beauties of heathen authors, and have often given them credit for excellencies, that were neither designed, nor discovered, by the authors themselves. But we need never be afraid of ascribing too much to him, who delivered to us the sacred oracles. If time would permit, we might point out a great variety of passages that would illustrate this remark. But *that* before us, may stand as a specimen of the rest. Peter had exhorted the Jews to believe in Christ, that their sins might be blotted out by his blood. The Jews imagined, that a compliance with this exhortation would be a defection from Moses. Peter therefore obviated this objection by an appeal to the writings of Moses; and shewed them, that Moses himself, not only foretold the advent of this new prophet, but enjoined an unreserved obedience to him under the severest penalties. Thus he turned their regard for Moses into an argument in support of that very doctrine, which for the sake of Moses they were inclined to reject. His words naturally lead us to set before you,

I. The character of Christ—

The words of the text are twice mentioned in Deut. xviii. and twice mentioned in the Acts of the

Apostles[a]. They may well therefore be considered as deserving peculiar attention.

They set forth the character of Christ *literally*—

[When God had spoken to the Jews in thunderings and lightnings, they entreated that he would, in future, communicate his mind and will to them through a mediator. He, approving their request, promised them a prophet raised up from among themselves, who should fully reveal to them his most secret counsels[b]. Such a prophet was Jesus. He was raised up in a most extraordinary way, being the son of a pure virgin. He was taken from among their brethren, being of the tribe of Judah, and of the family of David. "Though he was in the form of God, and thought it no robery to be equal with God, he took upon him the form of a servant;" yea, "became a worm and no man, the very scorn of men and the outcast of the people." He revealed all that it was needful for men to know, and "opened their understandings that they might understand it." To him did the Father himself, by an audible voice from heaven, apply this prophecy[c]. And Jesus thus *literally* executed the commission given him of the Father.]

But it is in a *typical* view that the text is principally to be considered—

[Our Lord resembled Moses in the offices of a lawgiver, a saviour, an intercessor. But, waving all observations respecting these, let us trace the resemblance which subsisted between them, as "prophets" of the Most High God.

Both of them *received their doctrines in the same way.* Moses was not merely instructed, like other prophets, by visions, or dreams, or by the "still small voice" of inspiration, but was admitted to converse with God as a man talketh with his friend, and received the law from the hands of God, engraven upon stones by God himself. In this he differed from all the other prophets that ever existed in the world, till this new Prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ, arose. But Christ had been from all eternity "in the bosom of the Father[d];" and he taught the very truths which he had heard, and learned, of the Father[e].

Both of them also *taught the very same doctrine.* Moses gave the law to be a "ministration of death," and a rule of life; and our Lord explained, and enforced it, for the very same ends. Moses also pointed the people to the sacrifices

[a] Acts vii. 37. [b] Deut. xviii. 16—18. [c] Matt. xvii. 5.
[d] John i. 18. [e] John viii. 28.

as the only means of expiating their offences: our Lord also declared, that he "gave his life a ransom for many;" and that it was by the shedding of his blood alone, that any could obtain the remission of their sins[f].

Moreover, both of them *taught in the same manner.* Moses spake, not as one giving advice, but *with authority,* "Thus saith the Lord;" yet he instructed the people *with* astonishing *meekness* and forbearance: and when they, in direct opposition to what he had taught them, revolted from God, and set up a golden calf, he was so filled *with compassion* towards them, as to pray, that he himself might be blotted out of the book of God, rather than that they should suffer the punishment due to their transgressions. Thus did Jesus preface his instructions with that *authoritative* declaration, "I say unto you:" yet so mild was he, that he made his meekness a plea with persons, to encourage them to learn of him; "Learn of me, for I am *meek* and lowly of heart:" and to such a degree did he *compassionate* the obstinate refusers of his law, that he wept over them, and with his dying breath pleaded their ignorance in extenuation of their guilt[g].]

While Moses thus explicitly foretold the prophetical character of our Lord, he declared to us also,

II. Our duty resulting from it—

As all the offices of Christ are replete with benefits to our souls, so each lays upon us some correspondent duties and obligations. While we rely on him as our Priest, and obey him as our King, we must regard him as our Prophet, by attending to his instructions—

This is plainly *declared* in the text—

["*Him* shall ye hear," is the command of God. But it is not in a careless manner that we are to regard his voice; we must incline our ear to him, and hear him *with* fixed *attention.* We must so consider the dignity of his person, and the importance of his message, as to receive his word *with* the deepest *reverence;* not gainsaying it, and sitting in judgment upon it, but bringing every high thought and every proud reasoning into subjection to it[h]. It becomes us also to listen to it *with* lively *joy,* as to the voice of our Beloved; knowing that there is not a word of his lips, in which there are not treasures of knowledge, and inexhaustible fountains of salvation[i]. Above all, we must attend to it *with unreserved submission* to his will; we must obey it "in *all* things, *what-*

[f] Matt. xxvi. 28.
[g] Luke xix. 41. and xxiii. 34.
[h] 2 Cor. x. 5.
[i] Isai. xii. 3.

soever he shall say unto us:" whatever he may enjoin or forbid, we must never reply, "This is an hard saying;" but must instantly "pluck out the right eye, or cut off the right hand, that has caused us to offend."]

Nor is this merely declared; it is *enforced* also by the most awful sanctions—

[God will put a difference between his friends and his enemies, in the last day. They shall all indeed appear before his tribunal; but "he will separate the goats from the sheep." They, that hear not this great Prophet, shall be taken from among those who have obeyed his voice; "they shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." As Korah and his company were destroyed from among Israel, so shall the disobedient from among the just. It will be of little avail for them to say, I was sober, charitable, devout: if they did not hear that Prophet with attention, reverence, joy, and an unreserved submission to his will, their destruction is sure, their doom is sealed. Nor will there be any exception to it in favour of the great and learned: every soul is alike included. Let none reply, God forbid; for God says, "*It shall come to pass;*" and "he is not a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent." What madness then is it for any person whatsoever to persist in a neglect of the words of Christ! O, let us turn to him. Let us sit, with Mary, at his feet[k]. Let us hear *him*, and him *only*. Let us believe on him as "the way, the truth, and the life." Let us "deny ourselves, and take up our cross, and follow him." "So shall we be his true Disciples," and, in due season, experience the accomplishment of that promise, "Where I am, there shall also my servant be[l]."]

In this threatening, however, there is a blessed promise IMPLIED—

[If the disobedient be destroyed *from among* the Lord's people, it follows, that the obedient shall not be destroyed; the humble, and sincere follower of Jesus shall never perish. This also extends to all; "*every soul*" that shall unfeignedly obey his voice, whatever his past life may have been, shall most assuredly be saved. Unbelief may be ready to make exceptions; but God says, "*It shall come to pass.*" Nor is this merely an uncertain inference from the text, but an express promise from God himself; "HEAR, AND YOUR SOUL SHALL LIVE[m]." Let this encourage us to listen more than ever to the voice of Jesus in his word. Let us read, and

[k] Luke x. 39. [l] John xii. 26. [m] Isai. lv. 3.

meditate, and pray. Let us get our souls cast, as it were, into the mould of the Gospel, that, being altogether formed and fashioned by it, we may be "meet for the inheritance" reserved for us. Thus will this Prophet be glorified in us; and we receive the full benefit of his instructions.]

OUTLINE NO. 1746

HOLINESS THE GREATEST BLESSING.

Acts iii. 26. *Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.*

THE ground on which the Jews rejected our blessed Lord was, that, in their estimation, he opposed Moses. The Apostle Peter therefore referred to Moses and the prophets, to shew that Jesus was the very person whose advent they had all predicted: and that Moses, in particular, had required them to believe in Him, as the only possible means of ever obtaining acceptance with God: "A prophet shall the Lord God *raise up* unto you of your brethren, like unto me: Him shall ye hear, in all that he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul which will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed from among the people." Then, in my text, he tells them, that "God, having *raised up* his Son Jesus, had sent him *to them first,* in order to bless them, in turning away every one of them from their iniquities." In opening these words, I will shew,

I. Why Christ was preached *first* to the Jews—

This was done by a special appointment of Almighty God,

1. Because with them primarily was the covenant made—

[To Abraham and his seed were the promises given: and the covenant was renewed with Isaac and with Jacob, his lineal descendants. From these the whole Jewish nation sprang; and consequently they were regarded as heirs of the blessings which had been so limited. To them this privilege had been confined for two thousand years. The law of Moses, which forbad all unnecessary intercourse with the Gentiles, tended

to confirm them in the idea that the blessings belonged exclusively to them. Our Lord's own declaration, that he was "sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;" and his directions to his Disciples, "not to go into the way of the Gentiles, or into any city of the Samaritans, but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," yet further established this sentiment in their minds; and *that* so strongly, that they could not divest themselves of the idea, that they were to confine their ministrations to the Jews. Hence we find, six years after the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter needed repeated visions, and an express revelation from Heaven, to remove his prejudices, and to prevail on him to preach the Gospel to Cornelius. And so strong was the same prejudice on the minds of all the Apostles, that in full conclave, as it were, they called him to account for going to a Gentile; and were with difficulty persuaded that, in so doing, he had not sinned against God[a]. Even St. Paul, till the Jews were incurably obstinate in their rejection of his message, always addressed himself in the first instance to the Jews[b]: and in this he conformed to that express command, to "preach the Gospel unto all nations, *beginning at* Jerusalem[c]." The reason for this preference being shewn them, is assigned by the Apostle in the verse before my text: "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers; and therefore unto *you, first,* has God sent his Son to bless you.

2. Because the offer of the Gospel to them, in the first instance, would shew that Christianity could stand the test of the severest examination—

[Had it been made to the Gentiles first, the hearers would naturally have said, "These preachers are vile impostors and deceivers. Their Head and Leader has been put to death by the laws of his own country; and they come and persuade us that he was a divine person, dying for the sins of men. If they could bring any proof of what they say, why do they not persuade their own people *first,* and establish their religion in the place where these transactions came to pass? The reason is obvious: they know that their assertions will not stand the test of inquiry: and therefore they come to palm their falsehoods upon us, who cannot so easily detect them." This would be a reasonable ground for rejecting all they said. But, when they first of all addressed themselves to the Jews, who knew all that had taken place, and therefore were good judges of the question before them, it seems at least that the preachers of this strange doctrine defied detection as impostors, and were

[a] Acts x. 15, 16. and xi. 17, 18. [b] Acts xiii. 46.
[c] Luke xxiv. 47.

persuaded of the truth of their own assertions. Had they not fully believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and that they could prove it beyond contradiction, they would never have thought of attempting to convince the very persons who had so lately put him to death, and the very persons to whom their statements must of necessity be so galling and offensive. As far as their judgment went, it is clear they must have thought their ground tenable against the whole world.]

3. Because the reception of it amongst them would stamp its truth beyond contradiction—

[Within fifty days of our Saviour's crucifixion, thousands were, by one single address, converted to his religion; and from that day forward were multitudes overpowered by a conviction that was irresistible. At last, even their most bitter enemy, who had sought and laboured to extirpate Christianity, embraced it, and became the most zealous, active, and successful of all its advocates. Could this religion, established as it was without human power, and in the face of the most bitter persecution, be false? Had the powers of this world been engaged in its favour, or had force been used for the propagation of it, or had its doctrines sanctioned the indulgence of our corrupt appetites, it might possibly have succeeded, as the Mahometan delusion afterwards did. But it opposed all the passions and prejudices of mankind, and yet prevailed over them by the mere force of truth and the weight of evidence; and *that* not only over the poor and ignorant, but over multitudes who were fully competent to the task of examining its claims. The reception of it therefore, by *them*, was a public seal to its truth, and a recommendation of it to the very ends of the earth.]

4. Because the rejection of it justified the Apostles in offering it to the Gentiles—

[The Apostles, as we have seen, felt a backwardness to go to the Gentiles: but the obstinacy of the Jews compelled them: and this was their apology for so doing[d]. No doubt, if it had so pleased God, both Jews and Gentiles might have grown to any extent upon the same stock. But God, in his inscrutable wisdom, had determined otherwise: and therefore "the Jews were broken off, that we Gentiles might be graffed in[e]:" and in this was God's righteous dealing manifest. As many as would walk in the steps of Abraham, were received to mercy: but when the proffered mercy was rejected and despised, the day of mercy closed upon them, and they were left to reap the fruit of their impenitence and unbelief.]

[d] Acts xviii. 6. and xxviii. 28. [e] Rom. xi. 19.

Our next inquiry must be,

II. What was the blessing which he was sent to impart?

The Jews expected a temporal Messiah, who should deliver them out of the hands of all their enemies, and exalt them to a state of unrivalled power upon earth. And, no doubt, to those who could see nothing beyond the literal sense of prophecy, the prophetic writings appeared strongly to justify this expectation. But this was not God's purpose respecting them: it was a spiritual, and not a temporal kingdom, that Christ came to establish. Sin and Satan were the enemies that were to be subdued: and a kingdom of righteousness was to be established throughout the world. Holiness was the blessing which Christ was sent to impart:

Holiness, I say, was that which Christ was sent to bestow—

[He was not only to "make reconciliation for iniquity, but to make an end of sin, and to bring in everlasting righteousness[f]." "He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us, not merely from perdition, but from all iniquity also, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works[g]." In truth, his very name was intended to designate this special appointment: "He shall be called Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins[h]." And the whole Scriptures bear witness to this, as the great object which he came to accomplish[i] — — —]

And, as it was *the end*, so has it also invariably been *the effect*, of the Gospel—

[There can scarcely be conceived a more just representation of the Gospel and its blessings than that which the miracle in the preceding context affords us. A man was lame from his birth. By the Apostle Peter he was healed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And immediately you find the use which he made of the mercy vouchsafed unto him: "He, leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple; walking, and leaping, and praising God[k]." Here you see a man previous to his reception of the Gospel: never has he stirred one step in the ways of God. Here also

[f] Dan. ix. 24. [g] Tit. ii. 14. [h] Matt. i. 21.
[i] Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27. Eph. v. 25—27. [k] ver. 8.

you behold him as soon as the word came with power to his soul: in the sight of all, he rises to newness of life. The House of God is the first place that he affects, in order that he may honour his heavenly Benefactor; and there, with a joy unknown before, he puts forth all his energies in the service of his God. Thus it was in the day of Pentecost: and thus it will be, though in different degrees, in all who truly believe in Christ.]

And what is blessedness, if this be not?

[If the healing of the man's body was such a source of joy, what must the healing of the soul be? The truth is, that sin is the one source of all the misery that is upon earth: and the restoration of men to a measure of their pristine holiness in Paradise will restore them also, in the same proportion, to their pristine happiness. Holiness, in so far as it is wrought in the soul, is the commencement of heaven upon earth.]

SEE then here,

1. What Christianity really is—

[It is thought, by the generality, to be a plan devised and executed for the salvation of men from *destruction*. But this is a very low and contracted view of Christianity. It is a plan for the remedying of *all the evil which sin has done:* for restoring the Divine image to the soul, as well as for rescuing it from perdition. I pray you, brethren, to view it in *this* light; and to remember, that heaven itself would be no blessing to you, if sin had possession of your soul — — —]

2. What is the blessing now offered unto you—

[If Jesus was sent, *in the first place*, to the Jews, he is *now* sent to you: and the blessing which he *first* offered to them, he *now* offers to you. It is in this sense that "men are to be blessed in him; and for this shall all nations call him blessed[1]." Do not, I entreat you, suffer your minds to be drawn aside by earthly vanities. What have they ever done for you? or what can they do? If you were elevated to the highest rank, and put into possession of all that the world could give you, what would it all effect in a way of permanent and solid happiness? You would soon be forced to give the same testimony respecting it as Solomon did, that it is all "vanity and vexation of spirit." But where did you ever find a person give such a testimony respecting holiness? Where did you ever find a man who was not happy in proportion as his in-dwelling sins were mortified, and all heavenly graces were exercised in his

[1] Ps. lxxii. 17.

soul? O that you could be prevailed upon to try what this blessedness is! You would soon find that "the peace flowing from religion passeth all understanding," and that "its joys are unspeakable and glorified."]

OUTLINE NO. 1747

THE CRIPPLE HEALED BY PETER.

Acts iv. 8—10. *Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.*

PERSECUTION for righteousness' sake was foretold by Christ as the portion of all his people: and accordingly we find, that no sooner did his Apostles begin to publish the glad tidings of salvation, than they were arrested as criminals, and brought into a court of justice to answer for their conduct. Peter and John had healed a man who had been "lame from his mother's womb." In consequence of this, multitudes were gathered together, to inquire into this miracle, and to learn by what means it had been wrought. Peter declared to them all, that it had been wrought by that very Jesus, who had so recently been crucified by them, but who was risen from the dead, and possessed of all power in heaven and in earth[a]. This testimony was the means of converting an immense number of persons to the faith of Christ[b]. But it grieved and incensed the rulers, who immediately adopted measures to crush the rising sect; apprehending and imprisoning the two Apostles, and on the very next day bringing them to trial as disturbers of the public peace. Peter renewed the testimony he had before given, and persisted in declaring, that the miracle had been wrought by Jesus of Nazareth, in proof that he was risen from the

[a] Acts iii. 1—16. [b] ver. 4.

dead, and was the true Messiah, the Saviour of the world.

In considering this miracle, we shall notice it,

I. As a ground of conviction to the Jews—

That a great miracle had been wrought, was manifest to all, insomuch that the rulers themselves were constrained to acknowledge it[c]. Hence Peter took occasion to shew them,

1. That Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah—

[It was obviously beyond the power of man to effect so great a work, as that of restoring in a moment to the perfect use of his limbs "a man who was forty years of age," and had been a cripple from the womb. Whence then did Peter and John obtain the power to effect it? This was the point which the rulers desired to ascertain[d]; and this could be learned only from the Apostles themselves. Peter boldly answered the interrogatories which were put to him; and declared, that the lately-crucified, and now exalted, Jesus had empowered them to communicate this blessing to the man[e]. But how could he convey to them this power, if he were not himself alive? or how could he enable them to do what nothing but Omnipotence could effect, if he himself were not omnipotent?

This argument was addressed to the very people who had bribed the soldiers a few weeks before to say, that the Disciples had come, whilst *they* were asleep, and had stolen the body of Jesus from the tomb. But though the rulers had satisfied their nation by accounting in that manner for the supposed resurrection of Jesus, they did not now dare to bring forward such an absurdity in anwer to the Apostles: for of what use would the dead body of Jesus be? could that enable the Apostles to work a miracle? or would God communicate miraculous powers to them for the express purpose of sanctioning the most wicked falsehood that could be fabricated?

Here then the argument was incontrovertible: a miracle had been wrought: the persons who had been the instruments of effecting it, ascribed the power to Jesus, who, *agreeably to the prophecies concerning him*, had been "set at nought by the builders, and was become the Head of the corner[f]:" there was therefore no alternative left, but to acknowledge Jesus as the true Messiah. How infatuated must they be, who could withhold their assent from so plain a truth!]

2. That they in God's sight were the worst of murderers—

[c] ver. 14, 16. [d] ver. 7. [e] Acts iii. 16. [f] ver. 11.

[They had not been able to fix any charge of guilt upon him: seeing that he had in all things approved himself "The Holy One and the Just:" yet had they insisted on his crucifixion, when Pilate, convinced of his innocence, had "determined to let him go:" yea, though he was "the Prince and Author of life," they had preferred "a murderer" and destroyer of life before him[g]. It was true, they had acted "ignorantly," blinded by their own prejudices and passions[h]: but still they were highly criminal in the sight of God; and must perish to all eternity, if they did not look to Him as their Saviour, whom they had crucified as a malefactor.

What a tremendous charge was this! To be accused of murder! of murdering the Prince of life, and "crucifying the Lord of glory!" But the charge was undeniable: and no hope of mercy remained to them, but by repenting of their guilt, and seeking to be cleansed from it in that very blood which they themselves had shed.]

But, as the miracle in this view is profitable chiefly to the Jews, we shall proceed to consider it,

II. As a ground of consolation to us—

Whilst we enter into all the feelings of the man that was restored, and are ready, as it were, to unite with him in all the expressions of his joy, we cannot but regard his miraculous restoration as calculated,

1. To confirm our faith—

[What cannot the Lord Jesus Christ effect? Whose soul can he not heal as easily, and as effectually, as he healed the body of that poor man? "Is there any thing too hard for him?" — — —]

2. To encourage our hope—

[Long had that man neglected the opportunities which the presence of Jesus at Jerusalem afforded him: for we cannot doubt, but that if he had applied to Jesus for relief, as myriads of others did, he would not have applied in vain. But now the mercy which he had never thought of seeking, was conferred upon him unsolicited[i]. What then will not Jesus do for them that *ask* him? What though we have slighted him all our days, and have never so much as thought of him till this present hour; will he spurn us from his footstool? Has he not said, that "*Whosoever* cometh to him, he will *in no wise* cast out?" — — —]

3. To inflame our love—

[g] Acts iii. 13—15. [h] Acts iii. 17. [i] Acts iii. 6, 7.

[We wonder not at the ecstacies of the restored man: we should rather wonder if he had not so expressed his joy and gratitude. But have not we also cause for joy? Does not every recovery from sickness, or every continuance of health, proceed from the same source? and is it not equally a ground of praise and thanksgiving? The circumstance of his cure being miraculous attracted more attention, it is true; but it added nothing to the value of the blessing bestowed: and if we were duly sensible of the benefits we enjoy, we should glorify our God even as he did.

But what if the Lord Jesus Christ has healed our *souls?* What if, by his life-giving word, he has quickened us from the dead? Should not *we* praise and magnify his name? Would not "even the stones cry out against us, if *we* held our peace?" See what the prophet foretold as the effect of the preached Gospel; "Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing[k]." See what David experienced as the result of this mercy to his own soul[l]; and know, that if the same *external* demonstrations of joy be not called for, the same *internal* frame of mind as the healed cripple possessed, should distinguish every one that professes to believe in Christ ——— "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" is surely as proper to be asked on account of spiritual blessings, as of any mercies that can be vouchsafed to our poor perishing bodies.]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. Let us seek ourselves to be living witnesses for Christ—

[Little did this healed cripple imagine what weight he added to the Apostles' testimony, or how the sight of him confounded all the enemies of the Lord Jesus. And little does the consistent Christian imagine to what a degree he strengthens the hands of those who preach the Gospel. Truly we take courage when we can appeal to the effects of our ministry on the hearts and lives of our hearers. O let those who profess to have received the truth, shew, that the grace of Christ has wrought as effectually on them for the renovation of their souls, as it wrought on the cripple for the restoration of his limbs. Let every temper and disposition of our minds constrain our enemies to acknowledge, that "we have been with Jesus," and are blessed monuments of his transforming power[m] ——— Such an exhibition of his power and grace will glorify him more than all the bodily cures he ever wrought[n].]

[k] Isai. xxxv. 6. [l] Ps. ciii. 1. 3. [m] See Isai. xliii. 11, 12. [n] 2 Thess. i. 11, 12. with Isai. lxii. 3.

2. Let us never be afraid to vindicate his cause—

[It was but lately that Peter was intimidated by the voice of a servant-maid; but now he boldly confronted the whole Sanhedrim, and charged them all with the murder of their Messiah. Thus, if the whole world were to rise against us for our attachment to Christ, we should not give way to any unworthy fears, or be deterred from confessing him openly before men. We must indeed look well to our own spirit, and guard against the intemperate sallies of an angry or vindictive mind: the apostolic rule should be rigidly adhered to, "Be ready always to give an answer to every one that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you *with meekness and fear*[o]:" but still we must never be ashamed of Christ, but "be faithful unto death, if ever we would receive from him a crown of life" — — —]

[o] 1 Pet. iii. 15.

OUTLINE NO. 1748

SALVATION BY CHRIST ALONE.

Acts iv. 12. *Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*

FROM the account given us of the miracles wrought by our blessed Lord, we should be led, not only to acknowledge him as the true Messiah, but to consider what we ourselves may expect at his hands. His Apostles, Peter and John, had healed a man who had been lame from his birth. The spectators, filled with astonishment, were ready to ascribe the honour of this miracle to them: but they told them by whom it had been effected, even by Jesus, whom *they* had rejected; but who, notwithstanding their contempt of him, was, and by this miracle had proved himself to be, "the head-stone of the corner[a]." They then directed the attention of their auditors to their own eternal interests, and assured them, that as Jesus alone restored the cripple to the use of his limbs,

[a] ver. 11.

so Jesus alone could save them from everlasting perdition[b].

In discoursing upon the words before us, it will be proper to notice,

I. What is implied—

Nothing can be more clearly implied than *that there is salvation for us in Christ.* It may be thought that it is unnecessary to insist upon so plain and obvious a truth, more especially among those who call themselves Christians: but this truth is far from being universally known; and the grounds on which it stands are very little considered: and, if it were as well understood as we are apt to imagine, still there would be a necessity for dwelling frequently upon it, on account of its vast importance, and of "determining with St. Paul to know nothing among our people but Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

In confirmation of it, we shall appeal,

1. To the typical representations of Christ—

[There were a great variety of sacrifices under the law, which typified the Lord Jesus Christ. The lamb that was offered every morning and evening, foreshewed "the Lamb of God that should take away the sin of the world:" and the scape-goat, which bore the iniquities of all Israel into an uninhabited wilderness, exhibited in yet more striking colours the removal of our guilt by a transfer of it to the head of Jesus. To dwell on all the ceremonies that were appointed on different occasions for the expiation of sin, is needless: suffice it to observe, that "the blood of bulls and of goats could not take away sin;" and that if those offerings had not respect to Christ, they were altogether unworthy, either to be prescribed to man, or to be accepted for him. But the efficacy of those sacrifices for the ends for which they were instituted, proves, beyond a doubt, the infinitely greater efficacy of that sacrifice which Christ in due time offered on the cross[c].]

2. To the positive declarations concerning him—

[Nothing can be conceived more clear and strong than the Scripture declarations of Christ's sufficiency to save.

[b] It is evident that the text refers, not to bodily healing, but to a salvation which the Apostles themselves, and all their hearers, stood in need of.

[c] Heb. ix. 13, 14.

How forcibly has the prophet marked the extent[d], the fulness[e], and the freeness[f] of his salvation! He invites "all the ends of the earth," even persons defiled "with crimson sins," to accept all the benefits of the Gospel, "without money and without price." In the New Testament the same things are spoken with all the energy that language can afford. All, without exception, are exhorted to come to Christ[g], with all assurance that he will cleanse them from all sin[h], and bestow upon them freely all the blessings of grace and glory[i]. Is all this a mere mockery and delusion? It surely is so, if Christ be not "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him[k]."]

3. To matter of fact—

[We can draw aside the veil of heaven, and point to some before the throne of God, who are such monuments of grace as leave no doubt respecting the sufficiency of Christ to save any others whatsoever. Behold that man, a murderer; a murderer of no common stamp: he was not satisfied with shedding the blood of a few of his fellow-creatures, or of those who were deserving of death; but he "made the very streets of Jerusalem to run down with blood, and that with the blood of innocents." Moreover, this was but a small part of the guilt he had contracted; so various and so enormous were his crimes. Yet is he, even Manasseh, a chosen vessel, in whom God is, and for ever will be, glorified.

Seest thou that woman also? We know not the particulars of her conduct; but she was so vile and notorious a sinner, that it was a disgrace to notice her, yea, our Lord's condescending to notice her was made a ground of doubting his divine mission: nevertheless she also, though once possessed by seven devils, is now in glory. She received, while yet upon earth, an assured testimony, from our Lord himself, that her sins, numerous as they were, were all forgiven[m]: and now is she singing the triumphs of redeeming love, as loud as any in heaven.

We could easily refer to a multitude of others, whose enormities were beyond all measure great, who nevertheless were "washed, justified, and sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God[n]." But enough has been said to put out of all question the blessed truth we are insisting on, namely, that Jesus is a Saviour, and a great one, and able to deliver all who trust in him[o].]

[d] Isai. xlv. 22. [e] Isai. i. 18. [f] Isai. lv. 1, 2.
[g] Matt. xi. 28. John vi. 37. [h] 1 John i. 7. Acts xiii. 39.
[i] John iv. 10. and vii. 37, 28. [k] Heb. vii. 25.
[l] 2 Chron. xxxiii. 1—13. [m] Luke vii. 47, 48.
[n] 1 Cor. vi. 9—11. [o] Isai. xix. 20.

Let us now turn our attention to,

II. What is expressed—

What solemn asseverations are these in the text! One would have supposed that the former of them would have been quite sufficient: but the Apostle thought no repetitions superfluous, nor any accumulation of words too strong, on such a subject as this. Indeed, it is of infinite importance to every one of us to know, that, as there is salvation for us in Christ, so "*there is no salvation in any other.*"

1. There is not—

[*In whom else can we find the requisites of a Saviour?* In whom can we find a sufficiency, either of merit to justify, or of power to renew, a sinner? If we should apply to the highest angel in heaven to give us of his merit, he would tell us that "he himself is only an unprofitable servant; for that he does no more than is his duty to do[p]." If we should entreat him to change our hearts, he would confess his utter inability to effect so great a work. Shall we then look to ourselves? We are full of sin. Our merit is found—where? not in heaven truly, but in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone[q]. "Nor have we in ourselves a sufficiency even to think a good thought[r];" much less to renew ourselves after the Divine image. None but Jesus could atone for sin: none but Jesus could yield such an obedience to the law as should be capable of being imputed to others: none but Jesus can send down the Holy Spirit into the souls of men, or say to them, "My grace is sufficient for you[s]:" and therefore "there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved."

If there were any other Saviour, the most eminent of God's servants would have had some intimation of it. Abraham, the friend of God, and the father of the faithful, would probably have heard of him: but he knew of none other; for he sought acceptance through Christ alone, and was justified solely through faith in him[t]. David too, the man after God's own heart, who was inspired to write so much respecting Christ, would probably have been acquainted with such an important fact in order to his own salvation; but he sought refuge in none but Christ; "Purge me with hyssop," says he, "and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow[u]." We might hope at least that some information of this kind

[p] Luke xvii. 10. [q] Rom. iii. 19. [r] 2 Cor. iii. 5.
[s] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [t] Rom. iv. 3—5. [u] Ps. li. 7.

would have been given to the Apostle Paul, who was more fully instructed in the mind and will of God than any other person: yet he knew of no other name but that of Jesus; he renounced all hope "in his own righteousness, that he might be found in Christ[x];" and "he determined to insist on nothing, in all his ministrations, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified[y]."

Whether therefore we consider the insufficiency of all the creatures to stand in the place of a Saviour to us, or the utter ignorance of all the Prophets and Apostles respecting the appointment of any creature to sustain that office, we may be sure that there is none other than the Person mentioned in the text, who is a man indeed, but is, at the same time, "God over all blessed for evermore."]

2. There cannot be—

[We presume not to be wise above what is written; or to say what God might have done if he had pleased: but we are fully warranted by the Scriptures to say, that, consistently with God's honour, as the Moral Governor of the universe, man could not have been saved without a Mediator: nor could any mediator besides Jesus have been found to execute all that was necessary for our salvation. It was necessary that the justice of God should be satisfied for the violations of his law; that his holiness should be displayed in a marked abhorrence of sin; that his truth should be kept inviolate by the execution of his threatenings; and that his law should be honoured, as well by an obedience to its precepts, as by an enduring of its penalties. Now none but Jesus, who was God as well as man, could effect all these things, and therefore none but he could save us.

But there is yet another ground on which we may deny that any other could save us; namely, that if we were indebted to any other, either for righteousness or strength, we could not join in the songs of the redeemed in heaven, but must separate from the heavenly choir[z], and ascribe to ourselves, or to some other, (inasmuch as we were indebted to ourselves or them,) the honour of our salvation. And how would this comport with the dignity of Jehovah, who has determined "that no flesh should glory in his presence?" It is in vain to say that the glory would ultimately accrue to him: for if we be saved by, or for, any thing of our own, we may, and must, so far take the glory to ourselves[a]: and that would create discord in heaven, and be irreconcileable with the honour of the Divine Majesty.]

ADDRESS—

1. The careless—

[x] Phil. iii. 9. [y] 1 Cor. ii. 2. [z] Rev. vii. 9, 10.
[a] Rom. iv. 2.

[Wherefore are men so indifferent about their spiritual concerns? Is it that they are in no danger of perishing? If that were the case, why is so much said respecting salvation? and why are we cautioned so strongly against relying on any but Jesus Christ? Surely the very circumstance of Christ being sent down from heaven to die for us, is enough to alarm all our fears, and to convince us, that, if the salvation offered us could be procured by none but him, the danger of those who are not interested in him must be inexpressibly great. Let the careless then consider this; and flee for refuge to the hope that is set before them.]

2. The self-righteous—

[It is difficult to convince those who are looking to Christ *in part*, that they are really renouncing Christ *altogether*. But the Scriptures are so plain on this point, that there cannot be the smallest doubt respecting it. Salvation is "of faith, on purpose that it may be by grace[b]:" and if it be, whether in whole or in part, by our own works, it ceases to be of grace: it must be wholly of grace, or wholly of works[c]: it must exclude boasting altogether, or else admit it. But boasting must be excluded wholly[d]: and therefore all dependence whatsoever on our own works must be wholly and for ever renounced[e]. If we will not accept salvation on these terms, "Christ shall profit us nothing[f]."]

3. The desponding—

[The person healed by Peter and John was a very fit emblem of our state by nature and practice. "We are transgressors from the womb." But, desperate as in appearance our condition is, there is in Jesus a sufficiency of power and grace to make us whole: "his name, through faith in his name, shall give us a perfect soundness in the presence" of God and man[g]. Let none complain as though they were beyond the reach of mercy: for there is nothing impossible with Jesus: "with him there is mercy; with him is plenteous redemption; and he shall redeem Israel from all his sins[h]."]

[b] Rom. iv. 16. [c] Rom. xi. 6. [d] Rom. iii. 27.
[e] Rom. iii. 8. [f] Gal. v. 2, 4. [g] Acts iii. 16. and iv. 10.
[h] Ps. cxxx. 7, 8.

OUTLINE NO. 1749

CONTEST BETWEEN PREJUDICE AND RELIGION.

Acts iv. 18—20. *And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*

WHEN we see the enmity of the human heart against religion in these days, we are ready to impute some blame to the persons in whom that religion is displayed: it scarcely seems possible that a thing so excellent and beautiful as true religion should be an object of offence. But if we look back to the first establishment of Christianity, we find that the same aversion to it was then manifested by ungodly men, even though it was exhibited in the purest form, and was recommended by the most beneficent and stupendous miracles. In the history before us we see in a very striking view,

I. The force of prejudice—

Nothing can be conceived more unreasonable than the conduct of the Jewish Rulers towards the Apostles—

[They saw that a wonderful miracle had been wrought in confirmation of the doctrine which the Apostles preached[a]. Now what line of conduct would candour have prescribed? Would not any person under its influence have inquired about the doctrine, and compared it with the Holy Scriptures? Would he not have examined carefully whether there was any real connexion between the miracle and the doctrine, and whether it was indeed a testimony from Heaven to the truth of Christianity? But behold how the Jewish rulers acted on that occasion: they imprisoned the Apostles, tried them as criminals, disregarded all evidence in their favour, and, when they could not subvert the doctrine by argument, determined to suppress it by authority. They would have proceeded even to punish the preachers of it, if they had not been afraid of exciting discontent among the people: it was fear alone, and not equity, that prevented them from proceeding to yet severer

[a] ver. 16.

measures. Their language, in effect, was this: 'A great miracle has been wrought indeed; but we will not have it mentioned. The doctrine which it was intended to confirm, appears to be from God; but we will not have it mentioned. The tendency of the doctrine, as far as we can judge from the miracle, is most salutary and beneficial; but we will not have it mentioned. The preachers of that doctrine profess to have received a commission from God himself; but we will not suffer them to execute it. They tell us that they open to men the only possible way of salvation; but we care not for the salvation of men, nor will we suffer any further attempts to promote it. They tell us, that it is at the peril of their own souls to decline the office assigned them; but what care we about their souls? they shall not execute their office, though they, and the whole world, should perish through their neglect. They tell us they must obey God; but we care not for God: they shall obey us, and not God; and if they do not regard us more than God, we will make them feel the weight of our heaviest displeasure.']

But unreasonable as this was, it shews, as in a glass, the precise manner in which the enemies of religion act at this day—

[The truth and excellence of Christianity are universally acknowledged, together with the obligation of all persons to obey it: yet no sooner does any one begin to obey it from the heart, than his friends and relatives endeavour to check his progress. In vain does he bring his sentiments to the test of Scripture; or urge the commands of God, and the awful judgments that will await him if unfaithful to his God: authority, as in the case before us, usurps the place of reason, and the will of man is put in opposition to the will of God. Unreasonable and impious as this is, it is the practice of parents, of masters, of all that are in authority, as far as the laws of the land, or the liberal spirit of the times, will admit — — — and wherever religion most flourishes, there will this conduct most openly prevail[b].]

This however, for the most part, serves only to call forth,

II. The power of religion—

Beautifully was it exemplified on the occasion before us. Behold the Apostles;

1. How firm their conduct!—

[b] The terms "unreasonable and wicked" are still applicable to the generality of unbelievers. 2 Thess. iii. 2.

[Lately had they all fled from their Master through fear of participating his troubles; but now they face the whole Sanhedrim, undaunted, undismayed. They knew that God was on their side; and therefore they "feared not what man could do unto them." This was, and ever will be, the effect of true religion: "the righteous are as bold as a lion:" and they who truly fear God, will cast off every other fear———]

2. How forcible their appeal!—

[Their words were few, but unanswerable: for who can doubt whether *man* should rule, or *God?* Who can hesitate to determine the question in general, or how to act upon it in his own case? If man can do more for us than God, or prove a more formidable enemy than God, then may we prefer his favour before God's, and have a greater dread of his displeasure: but if man be so weak as to be crushed before the moth, then may we set at nought all his threatenings, and persist without fear in the service of our God. Indeed, if "we have seen, and heard" aright the blessed truths of the Gospel, we shall so feel their constraining influence, as to defy every effort of men or devils to counteract them.]

From this history then we may LEARN,

1. What is that doctrine we are concerned to hear—

[That is the true doctrine which proclaims salvation in "the name of Jesus." This it was which the Apostles preached; and which every minister must preach. There is indeed "salvation in no other name;" and therefore all who desire salvation should embrace it with their whole hearts———]

2. What is the treatment we must expect to meet with—

[If we either preach or profess the foregoing doctrine, we must expect the same scenes to be again realized as were exhibited in the Apostles' days. The enmity of the human heart against God is still the same as ever; and "they who are born after the flesh will still, as much as ever, persecute those who are born after the Spirit." "Let none then think it strange, if a fiery trial be sent to try them"———]

3. What is that conduct we are bound to observe—

[Amidst all the injuries they sustained, the Apostles yielded not either to invective or complaint. But they were immoveable as rocks. Thus must we possess our souls in patience, and maintain our profession steadfast unto the end———].

OUTLINE NO. 1750

CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS FORE-ORDAINED.

Acts iv. 27, 28. *Of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.*

A COMPARISON of events with prophecy is a source of the strongest conviction and consolation to the mind. So the Apostles found it in the hour of trial, when, for the Gospel's sake, they had been imprisoned, and menaced with the severest punishment that could be inflicted on them. They saw that the prophecies relating to their Divine Master had all been unwittingly fulfilled, even by his bitterest enemies: and they comforted themselves with the thought, that the same God, who had so accomplished his own gracious purposes in relation to him, would in like manner bring glory to himself out of the sufferings which they also were called to endure. They cite before God the prediction brought to their minds; and they declare, that, in all which had been done to the holy child Jesus, they saw nothing less than a complete accomplishment of God's eternal counsels and decrees.

In discoursing on these words, I will,

I. Confirm their assertion—

The assertion is made in the form of an appeal to God: and it relates to the sufferings of Christ,

1. As fore-ordained of God—

[All of them were fore-ordained, when God determined to give up his only dear Son to die for the sins of men. Man had merited condemnation: and Jesus must be condemned by a legal process, and be "numbered with transgressors." Man had incurred the penalty of God's law, and was to be accursed from God: and Christ must die a death which God's law pronounced accursed, even the death of the cross[a]. In executing this judgment, there must be a concurrence of all orders of men,

[a] Gal. iii. 13.

Jews and Gentiles, the highest rulers and the lowest populace; Jews, to accuse him according to their law; and Gentiles, to adjudge him to a death which was not recognised by that law, and which could be inflicted by Gentiles only. Man had deserved the utmost shame and contempt: and to these must Jesus be exposed, even as one "worthy to be abhorred" by all mankind[b]. He must be scourged also, though that was no part of the punishment connected with crucifixion. A vast number of very minute circumstances, also, were to attend his crucifixion. He was to be betrayed by one of his own Disciples; sold for thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave; and, whilst yet upon the cross, to be taunted by the populace, and challenged, if he were not an impostor, to save himself. Vinegar was to be offered to him, instead of a draught that should assuage his anguish: lots were to be cast for his vesture: and though no bone of his was to be broken, he was to be pierced in his hands and feet, and in his side even to the heart[d]. Together with these, and a multitude of other minute circumstances which were ordained of God to be attendant on his death, it was appointed that he should "make his grave with the rich."

And all these things the Apostles speak of,]

2. As executed by man—

[The Psalmist clearly predicts the union of all manner of persons, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, in the execution of this bloody tragedy. And the Apostles call God to witness, that the prophecy adduced had been literally fulfilled in Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentile soldiers and the people Israel[e]. Yea, so exactly had every prophecy been fulfilled, that it seemed as if all the different classes had been called together, to examine carefully into the predictions; and each person had had his part assigned him, so that not one jot or tittle of them might remain unfulfilled. Judas shall betray him. The chief priests, unable, by reason of their subjection to the Romans, to execute their own law, shall deliver him to Pilate, the Roman governor. He, willing to pacify them, shall have him scourged; but afterwards shall be constrained, by their clamour, to give orders for his crucifixion. The populace shall be ready enough, each in his place, to fulfil the rest; and the Roman soldier, to ascertain, or complete, his death, shall pierce him with the spear. All shall be as active as if they had conspired together to perform their respective parts, and to accomplish every prediction respecting him. Thus it had been ordained of God that it should be: and thus, in fact, it was; every one acting an

[b] Isai. xlix. 7. [c] Ps. cxxix. 3. [d] John xix. 36, 37.
[e] Ps. ii. 2, 3. with ver. 25, 26.

independent part, as occasion called for it, and as his situation enabled him to act: and thus was there as complete an agreement between the predictions and events, as between a seal with ten thousand lines and the impression taken from it.]

Their assertion being thus confirmed, I will proceed to,

II. Shew the proper and legitimate consequences to be deduced from it—

If we mark only the *expressions* in my text, we shall be ready to draw from them very erroneous inferences and deductions. We shall be ready to say, 'If what these people did was only "what God's hand and counsel had determined before to be done," we must not condemn *them: they* were only instruments in the hand of a superior power: and if there be any evil in what they did, it must be traced to Jehovah himself, whose counsel had decreed it, and who, by his power, stimulated them to the commission of it.' But all this is quite erroneous. Though God had ordained these things, he never instigated any man to the commission of them; he only elevated men to situations, where, if they were so disposed, they might execute all the evil that was in their hearts, and left them at liberty to follow their own will. It was thus that he elevated Pharaoh to the throne of Egypt, and gave him up to the hardness of his own heart: and Pharaoh, of his own mind and will, persisted in his opposition, till the Jews were irrecoverably delivered, and he with all his army were destroyed. Thus St. Peter told the Jews, that though Jesus had been "delivered according to the determinate counsel of God, they with wicked hands had crucified and slain him[f]." "As for God, he cannot be tempted of evil; neither tempteth he any man[g]." In all that those murderers did, they were voluntary agents, and put forth only the evil that was in their own hearts. Therefore to them, and to them alone, must be imputed all the evil which they respectively committed.

But if we look to *the facts*, they will afford very

[f] Acts ii. 23. [g] James i. 13.

rich and useful instruction. From *them* may be deduced the following most important consequences:

1. That Christ is assuredly the true Messiah—

[If there had been but few predictions relative to the Messiah's death, and *they* such as admitted of being carried into effect by a well-concerted conspiracy, the fulfilment of them would have had comparatively but little weight in a subject of such importance. But they were so numerous, so minute, and, if I may so express myself, so contradictory, that it was not possible for his friends to form a conspiracy equal to the occasion. Besides, there were many of the predictions which could not be carried into effect, but by enemies. Who but enemies could deliver him up to the Gentiles? who but enemies could nail him to the cross, and load him with such contempt, and pierce him to the heart with the spear? But when we see so many prophecies fulfilled by people wholly unconnected with each other, yea, and hostile to each other, as Herod and Pilate were, and Jews and Gentiles were, the conviction is irresistible: He is, and must be, the predicted Messiah, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world — — —]

2. That no opposition, however sanctioned by the great and learned, should at all weaken our conviction of the truths we have received—

[Against the Lord Jesus Christ were engaged all the great and learned of the land. But was his religion, therefore, the more questionable? No: if there had not been one added to his Apostles as a witness for him, he would still have been the same Almighty Saviour, worthy of all possible honour and trust. So I may say with respect to us at this day. Many will urge, as they did, in reference to our Saviour, "Have any of the rulers and of the Pharisees believed on him? But this poor people are cursed." Yes, many will ask, with a kind of confidence, 'What do your governors in Church and State think of your opinions? Do you find them walking in the same strict and self-denying ways that you do?' I grant, there are not many rich, or mighty, or noble, or wise, that are called: and that, for the most part, it is to the poor that the Lord Jesus Christ is preached; and that by them, almost alone, is he received. But, if this invalidated not in any degree the testimony of the Apostles, neither does it weaken our testimony respecting the Gospel of Christ. "It is to the word and to the testimony" that we make our appeal; and by that must all sentiments be tried and judged. And, if we speak according to the Scriptures, we should not regard it, even though, like Elijah, we, in appearance, stood alone in the midst of the land. I grant, that *singularity will not prove us*

to be right: but *neither will it prove us to be wrong.* Christ's have ever been a "little flock," and his way "a narrow way:" and if ever we would be saved, we must come forth, like Lot, from Sodom; and be saved, like Noah, in the Ark prepared for us.]

3. That no trial shall come upon us beyond what our all-wise God shall see fit to permit, and what our infinitely gracious God will overrule for our good—

[Of all the heavy trials which our blessed Lord sustained, there was not so much as one which was not allotted to him by infinite Wisdom, and rendered subservient to the great ends of his mission. No one could seize him before his time: and though they drove nails through parts full of small bones, and pierced his side with a spear, no one was permitted to break so much as one of his bones. Now, thus will God take care of us, both in our individual and collective capacity. The attempts to destroy his Church have been numerous and sanguinary: but the gates of hell have never been able to prevail against it. And our trials, also, may be heavy; but God has engaged, that "they shall all work together for our spiritual and eternal good." We may well, therefore, adopt the language of the Psalmist; and say, "We will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled; though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof[h]." Behold the Lord Jesus Christ as enthroned in glory, and see in what his troubles have issued: or behold Joseph, when at the highest post of honour in Egypt, and his parents and his brethren were bowing down to him. There you see in what his successive trials issued; and how every one was but as a link in the chain of God's eternal purposes; a link without which, humanly speaking, all God's purposes respecting him had failed. Be not then cast down, because your troubles are numerous and heavy, and because you cannot yet discern what will be the end of them; but commit yourselves to God, in the assured expectation, that "if you suffer with your adorable Lord, you shall also reign with him in due time, and be eternally glorified together."]

[h] Ps. xlvi. 2, 3.

OUTLINE NO. 1751

THE BENEFIT OF UNITED PRAYER.

Acts iv. 31, 32. *And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of*

God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

WHETHER, as has been said by many, the blood of the Martyrs has been the seed of the Church, we will not undertake to determine: but we have no doubt but that persecution has greatly tended to benefit the Church in all ages: it has produced a greater degree of separation between the Church and the world, and has thereby contributed very essentially to keep the saints from much contamination, which from a closer union with the world they would of necessity have contracted. It has also driven them to prayer, and brought them help from above: and further, it has united them more with each other, and stirred them up to a greater measure of zeal in strengthening and encouraging one another to fight the good fight of faith. The very unreasonableness of the persecutors has in many instances confirmed the saints in their determination to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering[a]. Certainly if ever persecution was unreasonable, it was so in the instance before us. A most benevolent miracle had been wrought by the Apostles, who took occasion to proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name they had wrought it, as the only Saviour of the world. To prevent the extension of their influence, the rulers and elders laid hands upon them and imprisoned them, and with many threats commanded them to speak no more in the name of Jesus. But, behold the effect that was produced, both on the Apostles, and on the whole infant Church! the Apostles were no sooner liberated, than they "went to their own company and reported all that had been said unto them:" and the consequence was, that they all betook themselves to prayer, and obtained help from God to prosecute their work with augmented energy and effect.

The points to which we would call your attention are,

[a] Phil. i. 14.

I. The prayer they offered—

The particular point of view in which I wish this to be noticed is, as illustrating the holy superiority to all personal considerations, which the first Christians manifested in the midst of their deepest trials: they disdained to think of their own ease or interests, in comparison of God's honour, and the welfare of mankind. Yet so far were they from ostentation, that it is from what is omitted, rather than from any thing expressed, that we collect this exalted sentiment. In their prayer,

1. They view the hand of God himself in their trials—

[They address Jehovah as the Creator, and consequently the Governor, of all things both in heaven and earth. They bring to mind a prophecy of David, wherein it was foretold, that all the powers of the world would combine against the Lord and his Christ. They acknowledge that this prediction had been verified in the opposition which had been made to their Divine Master, by all, whether Jews or Gentiles. But in all this they see and confess the hand of God, ordering and directing all things in such a way that his own decrees and purposes should be all fulfilled[b].

Now all this may at first sight appear to have been irrelevant to their case: for, what reference had it at all to *their* sufferings? The connexion between the two must, as I have said, be found in that which is implied, rather than in that which is expressed. It is as though they had said, 'Thou, Lord, hast foretold that thy Church and people shall be persecuted: thou hast shewn us, in the person of thy dear Son, what we are to expect at the hands of ungodly men: but, as in his case, so in ours, nothing can be done but what thou thyself hast ordained; nor can the bitterest foe upon earth exceed the commission which thou, for wise and gracious ends, hast given him. We therefore bow not our knees to deprecate any trials, which thou mayest see fit to send, but only to ask of thee such a measure of grace, as shall enable us to sustain them, and such manifestations of thy power as shall carry conviction to the minds of our most obdurate enemies. Thus,]

2. They desire only that God may be glorified in them—

[b] ver 24—28.

[They desire to rise to the occasion, and to have their energy increased in proportion to the difficulties which they have to contend with. Their own concerns are swallowed up, as it were, in the honour of their God. Happy attainment! How surely must those supplications prosper, which are dictated by such a principle, and proceed from such hallowed lips!]

The acceptableness of their prayer will be best seen in,

II. The answer they received—

"The house was shaken wherein they were assembled," in token that God had heard them, and that he was able to effect whatever should most conduce to their welfare. The Holy Ghost also was poured out upon them in a more abundant measure, not in his miraculous powers, but in his gracious and sanctifying influences: so that the effect was immediately visible in all. Observe the effect which was instantly produced;

1. On the Apostles—

[In them we see an immediate increase of zeal and constancy: "They spake the word of God with boldness; not only not intimidated by the threats of their enemies, but greatly strengthened to execute their office with energy and effect; insomuch, that "with greater power than ever, they gave witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus[c]." Mark the connexion of this with their persecution; and see how influential their trials were to render their ministry more extensively beneficial. Their own souls were quickened by the opposition which they met with; they were strengthened from on high in answer to their prayers: every word they uttered was attended with unction and with power: having within themselves the fruits and evidences of Christ's tender care, they could not but commend him to others, as an able and all-sufficient Saviour, and urge all to seek the blessings which they themselves so richly enjoyed.

Now it is thus that ministers are formed at the present day. If they have experienced but few trials, they possess, for the most part, but little energy. It is only when, under difficult and trying circumstances, "their eyes have seen, their ears heard, and their hands handled the word of life," that they can speak of Christ with a feeling sense of his excellency. In

[c] ver. 33.

speculative knowledge they may be complete; but in divine unction they will be very defective; and their words, from the want of that unction, will never reach the heart. Hence God generally permits his most faithful servants to be severely tried, in order that from their own experience they may be able to instruct and comfort the people committed to their charge[d].

Next, see the effect produced,]

2. On the Church at large—

[As in the teachers there was an immediate increase of holy zeal, so was there in the hearers a visible augmentation of heavenly love. Instantly "the whole multitude of believers became of one heart and one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things that he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." They all considered themselves as one body: and exactly as the different members of a body, the eye, the ear, the hand, the foot, employ their respective powers, not with a view to any separate interest of their own, but for the collective benefit of the whole, so did these Christians, as soon as ever they were "filled with the Holy Ghost;" every one selling his houses or lands to form one common stock for the support and comfort of the whole.

Mark then here also the effect of persecution; how it united the Lord's people in one common bond, and advanced their mutual love to a height, which under other circumstances it would never have attained. Doubtless the particular act of casting all their property into one common stock is to be imitated only under circumstances similar to theirs: but the Spirit that dictated that act should abound in us, as much as in them: and it will abound in us in proportion as we possess the grace of Christ. The trials of the saints at this day being light, they know but little of sympathy, and make but little sacrifices for the good of others: but, if they were driven more to God by the sword of persecution, they would feel greater need of sympathy themselves, and would be ready to exercise it in a far larger measure towards others.]

From whence we may LEARN,

1. Where to go with our troubles—

[Whither should we go, but to that God, who has ordained them all, and promised to overrule them for our eternal good? The Apostles indeed went first "to their own company, and reported all that had been said to them:" but this was for the purpose of comforting and encouraging *them*, and not with a view to obtain comfort or encouragement themselves; for *that* they betook themselves to prayer, having

[d] 2 Cor. i. 3—6.

engaged all the Church to unite with them in their supplications. The benefit of this measure to all who engaged in it, you have already heard: whilst they were in the very act of pouring out their souls before God, an answer was given from on high; and every soul was filled with grace and peace. And say, brethren, has it never been so with you? Look back to seasons of affliction, when you could find no refuge but in God: have they not proved seasons of peculiar refreshment to your souls? Have you not received "strength according to your day," so as not only to endure your tribulations, but to glory in them?——— Bear in remembrance then that direction which God himself has given you; "Call upon me in the time of trouble, and I will hear thee, and thou shalt glorify me." Yes, "cast your burthen on the Lord; and he will sustain you."]

2. How to recommend our principles—

[It is to the shame of Christianity that there are so many parties amongst us, and that there is so little love exercised by them towards each other. Compare the Church at this time with the Church of Christ in that age: alas! at what a low ebb is vital godliness amongst the professors of the present day! Instead of uniting against the common enemy, they do little but dispute with each other: and, instead of every one denying himself for the good of the whole, they are all immersed in selfishness, and are intent only on their own personal ease or interest. But so did not the saints of old: they constrained their very enemies to say, "Behold, how these Christians love one another!" O that such seasons might speedily return, and that our eyes might witness them in this place! But it is to be feared that we shall never learn this lesson, till we are taught it in the school of affliction. Yet how much better were it to learn it from the example of the primitive saints, and especially from the example of "the Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich!" Beloved brethren, set these examples before you, and implore grace from God, that you may be able to walk in these blessed paths. Then will you "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," and constrain your very enemies to "acknowledge, that God is with you of a truth."]

OUTLINE NO. 1752

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA.

Acts v. 3—5. *But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.*

IN contemplating the dispensations of Providence, there are some which, on a superficial view, we should be ready to accuse of severity; but, on a closer inspection of them, we shall find them to be replete with mercy. At the first establishment of the Jewish religion, Nadab and Abihu were slain for offering incense with strange fire; as Corah also and his company were for their rebellion against Moses. But such judgments, though terrible to the individuals concerned, had a direct tendency to benefit the nation at large; inasmuch as they proclaimed to all, that "God was greatly to be feared," and "to be had in reverence by all them that are round about him." Thus, at the first establishment of the Christian Church, Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead for endeavouring to impose on the Apostles, and for professing to give the whole produce of their estate to the Church, whilst they held back a part of it for their own use. In our text, Peter shews him the enormity of his offence, and inflicts upon him the judgment which he richly merited. To make a suitable improvement of this history, we shall notice,

I. The representation here given of the Holy Ghost—

The falsehood uttered by Ananias and his wife seems to have been designed only to impose on the Apostles and the Church: but St. Peter speaks of it as "a tempting of the Spirit of the Lord[a]," and "a lying to the Holy Ghost," or, in other words,

[a] ver. 9.

"a lying unto God." Now from these expressions see who the Holy Ghost is:

1. He is a distinct person—

[It would be absurd to imagine that the Holy Ghost is a mere quality; for on such a supposition the language of the Apostle would have no meaning at all. If he is tempted and deceived, he must be a person: and accordingly we find him spoken of continually as *one* indeed with the Father and the Son, but yet as personally distinct from them.

He *possesses the attributes* of a person;—understanding[b], will[c], and, if not affections, yet a susceptibility of impression suited to the manner in which he is treated by us[d]. He *sustains the offices* of a person, being a Comforter[e], an Intercessor[f], a Teacher[g], a Witness[h]. He also *performs the acts* of a person; commanding[i], forbidding[k], judging[l]. And, that we may not confound him with either of the other persons of the Godhead, he is spoken of as distinct from both, and as sent *from* the Father *by* the Son for specific ends and purposes, which, according to the plan proposed between the Sacred Three, were to be accomplished by him alone[m].]

2. He is the true God—

[This also is declared with no less clearness than the former: for, He is called by *the incommunicable name*, Jehovah[n]. He has all *the perfections* of the Deity; eternity[o], omnipresence[p], omniscience[q]. He does *the works* that are proper to God alone: he formed the body of Jesus in the Virgin's womb[r]; qualified him for the office he was to sustain[s]; is the author of every good work in us[t]; and inspired from the very beginning all the Prophets and Apostles, that they might communicate to us with infallible certainty the mind and will of God[u]. He receives also *the worship* that is due to God only[x], and is joined with the Father and the Son as the glorious Being to whom we are consecrated in our baptism[y], and as equally with them the source of all spiritual blessings[z].

From this view of the Holy Ghost we see with what propriety the Apostle spoke of him as "*God;*" nor do we hesitate for a moment to proclaim him, "The Most High God[a]."]

[b] 1 Cor. ii. 11. [c] 1 Cor. xii. 11.
[d] Isai. lxiii. 10. Eph. iv. 30. [e] John xiv. 16, 17.
[f] Rom. viii. 26, 27. [g] John xiv. 26. [h] Rom. viii. 16.
[i] Acts xiii. 2—4. [k] Acts xvi. 6, 7. [l] Acts xv. 28.
[m] John xv. 26. [n] Isai. vi. 8—10. with Acts xxviii. 25.
[o] Heb. ix. 14. [p] Ps. cxxxix. 7. [q] 1 Cor. ii. 10.
[r] Luke i. 35. [s] Isai. lxi. 1. [t] Gal. v. 22.
[u] 1 Pet. i. 11. and 2 Pet. i. 21. [x] 2 Thess. iii. 5. Rev. i. 4.
[y] Matt. xxviii. 19. [z] 2 Cor. xiii. 14.
[a] Compare Heb. iii. 7—9. with Ps. lxxviii. 56.

The more exalted our conceptions of the Holy Spirit are, the more shall we see,

II. The importance of approving ourselves to him in all things—

It is certain we may commit the same sin as Ananias and Sapphira did—

[Let us get a precise idea of what their sin was. Many in the Church sold their possessions, and laid the whole produce of them at the Apostles' feet, to make a fund for the support of the Church at large[b]. Barnabas in particular is mentioned as having done this[c]. Doubtless this generosity gained them high credit in the infant Church: and Ananias and Sapphira determined to come in for a share of this honourable distinction. They sold their estate therefore; but not being able to trust God for their future support, or not choosing to relinquish all their temporal comforts, they agreed to keep back a part of the price, and to present only a certain portion of it to the Apostles. Wishing however to appear as eminent as others, they professed to give the whole produce; thus endeavouring to obtain the full credit of others, without making their sacrifice. This was their sin; a mixture of ostentation, of covetousness, of unbelief; a seeking of credit which they did not deserve, and a pretending to virtue which they did not possess.

This the Apostle calls "a lying unto," and "a tempting of, the Holy Spirit:" for it was an attempt to deceive the Apostles, whom the Holy Ghost had invested with miraculous gifts and powers; and it tempted the Holy Spirit to shew whether he were an omniscient, holy, and just Being, or not.

Hence then it appears that all *allowed* hypocrisy is of the very nature of their sin. The short-comings and defects of a *sincere* Christian, though contrary to his profession, cannot properly be classed with their sin; but every wilful deviation from duty, especially if deliberate and persevered in, is in fact a lying unto God.

What then must be said of those who harbour any secret lust? — — — or make any reserve whatever in their obedience to God? — — — or do even what is right in itself from any corrupt motive? — — — A desire of man's applause will carry some to great apparent heights of virtue; it will urge them to laborious exertions, and reconcile them to painful sacrifices: but God, who seeth the heart, will abhor all such offerings, and account them no better than that which Ananias and Sapphira presented to him.]

[b] Acts iv. 34, 35. [c] Acts iv. 36, 37.

And it is certain also, that if we do, God will both detect and punish it—

[God not unfrequently exposes hypocrites to shame in this world; and suffers their hidden corruption to be brought to light. How often does it happen, that a person, who on the whole has maintained externally a creditable profession, is instigated by his predominant passion, whether of lust or covetousness, to an act that blasts his character for ever! But, if no such exposure take place in this world, the mask will be taken off as soon as we come into the presence of our God. Alas! what will be our sensations, and the sensations of many around us, when we are interrogated by our Judge in relation to things from which perhaps we gained the greatest credit? What must have been the surprise of Ananias and Sapphira, and of all their friends too, when the act which appeared so excellent, was proved so faulty, and was visited with so awful a judgment! Let us endeavour to realize that scene, and we shall have some faint idea of the hypocrite's feelings at the day of judgment. We may easily deceive men; but "God will not be mocked:" to him every secret thought is open; and in the last day "he will make manifest all the counsels of our hearts[d]." Then, if not before, "our sin shall find us out;" and "the Holy Ghost himself," whom we have tempted and deceived, shall "be a witness" against us to our everlasting confusion[e].]

The only IMPROVEMENT we would make of this *subject*, is that which the Church itself made of the *event*—

[We read that "great fear came on all them that heard these things." O that such a fear may come on all who hear me this day!

Tell me, O ye who live in the allowed indulgence of open and known sins; have *ye* no cause for fear? If this liberal act of Ananias was so abhorred of God, because of the insincerity that attended it, and brought such a tremendous judgment upon him, do you think that your iniquities shall pass unpunished? — — —

And, ye who profess religion, have not ye cause for fear also, lest your services at last should be found to have been only splendid sins? Remember that "God requireth truth in the inward parts." If you had the whole armour of God upon you, and it were not fastened on with the girdle of truth, it would leave you exposed to all the arrows of the Almighty[f].

[d] 1 Cor. iv. 5. Ps. xliv. 21. [e] Heb. x. 15. Mal. iii. 5.
[f] Eph. vi. 14.

Those who are "hypocrites in heart heap up wrath[g];" and "fearfulness will at last surprise them[h]." Behold then, as our Lord said even to the Apostles, so say I to you, "Beware of hypocrisy[i]:" beware lest ye profess more than ye design to practise[k]. Seek to have "your hearts right with God." Entreat him to give you "the wisdom that is from above, which is without partiality, and without hypocrisy." Then will the Spirit of God abide with you[l]; then will the blood of Christ also cleanse you from the defilement which cleaves to your very best actions[m]; and God the Father will delight in you to all eternity[n].]

[g] Job xxxvi. 13. [h] Isai. xxxiii. 14. [i] Luke xii. 1.
[k] Jer. xlii. 20, 21. [l] 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17. [m] 1 John i. 7.
[n] Prov. xi. 20.

OUTLINE NO. 1753

THE DUTY OF MINISTERS.

Acts v. 20. *Go stand, and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life*[a].

CONSIDER the commission,

I. As given to the Apostles.

1. Suffer not yourselves to be intimidated—

[Execute the high commission you have received.
Assure yourselves of protection from on high.
Know that none can prevail against you any farther than God shall see fit — — — or than He can overrule for his glory, and for your good — — —]

2. Suffer not them to be robbed—

[The Gospel is the word of life and salvation (ver. 29—32.)
It is the *only* means of life — — — and the *effectual* means to all who receive it — — —
Suffer not envious and wicked men to rob them of it.
Regard not your own bodily life, if you may but advance the life of their souls—]

II. As given to us at this hour.

We have the same word of life to preach to you—

[You hear it under far more favourable circumstances.
None forbid *us* to preach it, or *you* to hear it — — —
You are come for the very purpose that you may hear it—]

[a] A little sketch given extemporaneously to a young friend.

Lo, then I now preach it to you—

[Christ has died that you *may* live.
Believe on him and you *shall* live.
This I declare to all, without hesitation and without exception.

Avail yourselves of the opportunity afforded you.
Contemplate the sad alternative if you reject our word.
If our word be not a savour of life unto life, it will be a savour to your death and condemnation — — —]

OUTLINE NO. 1754

THE ENDS OF CHRIST'S EXALTATION.

Acts v. 30—32. *The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.*

AMONG the various things which have weight and influence in forming decision of character, there is nothing so powerful as religion. The fear of God operates to the dissipating of all other fear; and the love of God subjugates or refines all creature attachments. Persons actuated by any other principle, will bend to circumstances: but religion will give us an uniform direction, like that of the needle to the pole. We see this very strongly illustrated by the conduct of Peter and the other Apostles. We acknowledge that they were not destitute of a religious principle during their Master's life: but it was not till the day of Pentecost that they fully understood the nature of Christianity, or were completely subjected to its dominion. From that time, the most timid of them were emboldened to confess Him whom they had just before forsaken and denied. They had just been imprisoned for bearing their testimony to his office and character: yet, when threatened with still heavier vengeance, they undauntedly persevered: charging the very rulers themselves with the guilt of murdering the Lord of glory, and affirming that the

very person whom they had crucified as a malefactor, was exalted to be the Saviour of the world.

In considering this address of theirs to the Jewish council, it will be proper to notice,

I. The testimony here borne to the Lord Jesus—

Observe,

1. The testimony itself—

[The Jewish rulers conceived, that, in having crucified the Lord Jesus, they had wholly subverted his influence in the world. But the triumph was altogether on the side of Jesus, of whom the Apostle testified, *that he was raised to the most exalted state in glory.* Jesus had foretold that he would rise again on the third day; and that, as he had come from the Father, so in his ascension he would return to the Father. And now the Apostle declared that this was accomplished in him: and that, though "he had been crucified through weakness, he was now raised by the power of God," and seated at the right hand of his majesty on high.

He further declared, *that he was invested with the highest honours.* He had been crucified as a malefactor who had arrogated to himself the title of "The King of the Jews;" nor had he interposed to save himself. But he was now "exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour;" even the Supreme Governor of the universe, and the Saviour of the whole world, of all at least who would believe in him. However strange such claims might appear to his murderers, they were no other than what the prophets had taught them to expect, seeing that "every knee was to bow to him, and all the ends of the earth were to be saved by him[a]."

To this he added, *that he was empowered to bestow the richest blessings.* He was to be the one fountain of good to all his believing people, "giving repentance" to the most obdurate, and "forgiveness" to the most abandoned, the very instant that they should seek these blessings at his hands.]

2. The truth and certainty of this testimony—

[*The Apostles all professed themselves "witnesses of these things;"* that is, witnesses of his resurrection and his ascension, and consequently of those things which were the special objects of his exaltation.

Now certainly they were *competent* witnesses, both of the resurrection and the ascension of our blessed Lord: for, though they had not actually seen him rise, they had seen him

[a] Isai. xlv. 22, 23.

frequently after he had risen, and had even eaten and drunk with him, and beheld him in the very act of ascending into heaven. The very incredulity which they manifested in relation to these things, is a strong confirmation that they did not hastily credit the report of others, or even their own senses, till they were overpowered with such evidence as was absolutely irresistible[b]. They were also as *unexceptionable* witnesses as could possibly exist: for, being poor illiterate fishermen, they could not frame an imposture that should deceive the whole world; nor had they the smallest inducement to attempt it, since they could expect nothing but contempt and persecution in this world, and eternal misery in the world to come. They gave their testimony too *in the most unexceptionable manner.* If they had been impostors, they would have gone to a distance, where their conspiracy should not so easily have been detected; or, at least, have delayed till the present ferment had subsided; and have practised their imposition first on the weak and credulous. But, instead of this, they bore their testimony *without any loss of time*, and *in Jerusalem* too, where every falsehood could be so easily detected, and *before all the Jewish rulers*, who were most of all interested in disproving the facts attested.

As for the testimony by which the Jewish rulers endeavoured to invalidate the assertions of the Apostles, it still further established the very point which it was intended to disprove[c]. For, if the guard slept, how could they tell what was done in their sleep? and why were they not punished? Why too did the rulers engage to screen them from punishment, when their disappointment and rage would rather have called forth their most vindictive efforts?

In addition to them, the Holy Ghost himself also bare witness to these things. The Lord Jesus had repeatedly declared, that, after his ascension to heaven, he would send the Holy Ghost to testify of him. On the accomplishment of this promise depended the validity of his pretensions. At the appointed time he fulfilled his word, and sent down the Holy Ghost in a visible manner on his Disciples. In this first instance then the Holy Ghost testified, that Jesus was indeed risen, and that he had ascended to the right hand of God. By the influence of the Holy Ghost, the Apostles were enabled to preach the Gospel in a great diversity of languages which they had never learned. They wrought also many and stupendous miracles in confirmation of their word. They were empowered also, by the imposition of their hands, to communicate the Holy Ghost to others. By all these things the Holy Ghost

[b] Mark xvi. 14. Luke xxiv. 39—43. John xx. 25—29.
[c] Matt. xxviii. 11—15.

bore yet further testimony to the Messiahship of Jesus. By his communications also, of light, and peace, and holiness, he testified in the hearts of all who received the Apostles' word: and to this hour does he continue to testify unto thousands in the same way.

Can we conceive that God the Father would have interposed in this astonishing manner to aid an imposture? Assuredly the facts so attested must be true; and Jesus is exalted for the ends and purposes which are specified in the text.]

To mark the immense importance of this subject, I proceed to shew,

II. The interest we have in it—

Of what importance this testimony was considered by the Jewish rulers we see by the effect it produced upon them: "They were cut to the heart," from a conviction that the testimony was true; and they sought to slay the witnesses, that the truths asserted by them might be no further spread among the people. Now this whole record calls on us,

1. To believe in Christ ourselves—

[We are as much interested in the resurrection and ascension of Christ, as ever the Jews were, because by the one we know him to be the Messiah; and because by the other we know him to be able to fulfil all that he has promised to his believing people. We are perfectly sure that he is "*a* Saviour," yea, *the* Saviour that was to come into the world; and that he has effected all which was necessary for our salvation, making a full atonement for all our sins, and working out for us a righteousness wherein we may stand perfect before God. We know also that he is "*a* Prince," yea, *the* Prince who shall rule over the whole world, and bring all things into subjection to his will. In this double capacity we are assured that he is able to "give repentance" to our souls, by "taking away the heart of stone, and giving us a heart of flesh;" and at the same time so to blot out our iniquities, that no sin we have committed shall ever rise up in judgment against us, or be imputed to us in the last day. What can be more delightful tidings to fallen man? Let every one of us hear them, and rejoice in them, and bless God for them. Let us renounce every kind and every degree of self-dependence, and have all our righteousness and strength in Christ alone——— And let none despond: for, if these tidings were proclaimed to those who had so recently imbrued their hands in the Saviour's blood, and were at this moment seeking to slay all his chosen Apostles, to whom shall they not be proclaimed? or to whom

shall they not be available, provided a penitential frame be really desired, and forgiveness of sins be fervently implored? — — —

At the same time let us receive Christ in *his entire character*, and look to him unreservedly for *all his* blessings. Let us not dream of "forgiveness" without "repentance," or think of calling him "Saviour" without submitting to him as our Ruler and Governor. All that God has united *in him for our benefit*, must be united *in us for his honour:* nor must we presume, or even wish, to "put asunder, what God has so inseparably joined together" — — — As we must have nothing united with Christ for the salvation of our souls, so there must be nothing in Christ which we do not actually receive from him, and manifest to be enjoyed by us as a matter of our daily experience before God.]

2. To make him known to others—

[The Apostles no sooner received the communications of God's Holy Spirit, than they preached the Saviour to all around them. Nothing could deter them from this blessed work. They had all been imprisoned; but they were not intimidated. They were menaced with severer punishment; but they made no account of any sufferings that could be inflicted on them; and when they were actually beaten, "they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the Lord's sake."

Now this shews us what we also are to do. We must "confess Christ" openly before all, and commend him to all, that they also may be made partakers of his salvation. True, we are not all called to minister after the manner of the Apostles: but in our life and conversation we must preach to all around us, and be "living epistles of Christ, known and read of all men."

At this period, through the tender mercy of God, there are greater facilities for the discharge of our duty than ever were afforded us before. There are societies without number for the diffusion of divine knowledge, both at home and abroad: and by aiding them we may all, in our respective spheres, contribute greatly to the spread of the Gospel, and the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom throughout the world[d] — — —

Imitate, then, the holy Apostles in their zeal and love; and, whilst you look to Christ for salvation yourselves, endeavour to make him known to the whole world, as their Prince, and as "the Author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him."]

[d] Here any particular society, whatever it may be, whether the *Bible Society*, or *Mission Societies to Jews or Gentiles*, or *Education Societies*, may be commended to the audience for their support.

OUTLINE NO. 1755

THE MAGNANIMITY OF THE APOSTLES.

Acts v. 41, 42. *And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.*

IN the annals of the world we find many examples of magnanimity, which excite our admiration, and shame the lowness of our attainments. But it may well be doubted whether any single instance which we read of in profane history, will stand the test of close examination. Pride and ostentation were almost invariably the fountain from which the most specious actions of heathens flowed: and in proportion as the principle was bad, the action itself also must have been depraved. But in the passage before us, we behold a greatness of mind which was truly admirable, and in every point of view worthy of our imitation. In discoursing upon the conduct of the Apostles as it is here set forth, we shall,

I. Illustrate their magnanimity—

The whole of their spirit and conduct on this occasion was in the highest degree worthy of their high calling—

1. They gloried in all their sufferings for Christ's sake—

[Poor and illiterate men are apt to be disconcerted if called into the presence of their superiors, especially if those superiors have the power and inclination to oppress them under the forms of law. But these poor fishermen, when summoned before the supreme council, pleaded their own cause with undaunted firmness, testifying against their very judges, that they had crucified the Lord, and exhorting them to believe in him as their exalted Prince and Saviour.

After having been unjustly imprisoned, and miraculously delivered from their confinement, they were again summoned before their oppressors, and again, though without either invective or complaint, they vindicated their conduct in an unanswerable manner: and, notwithstanding they were beaten, and menaced with severer treatment, and might therefore have felt indignation rise in their bosoms, they lost sight of all the

injuries which they themselves had sustained, and gloried in their sufferings as an honour conferred upon them, an honour of which they deemed themselves utterly unworthy.]

2. They persisted unalterably and indefatigably in the path of duty—

[Though they gloried at present in their sufferings, it might have been expected that they would be very cautious of exposing themselves to the increased resentment of their persecutors. But they well knew that Jesus Christ was the only Saviour of the world, and that all must eternally perish who did not believe in him. They therefore lost no time, but instantly resumed their labours both in public and in private. They declared the death of Christ to have been an atonement for sin; they testified of his resurrection and ascension to carry on his work in heaven; and they proclaimed a full, a free, an everlasting salvation to all that would believe in his name. This was the obnoxious doctrine which they were forbidden to preach: but they proceeded on this one principle, that they were bound to "obey God rather than men:" and they were determined to suffer the last extremities rather than swerve from the path of duty, or relax their exertions for the instruction and salvation of immortal souls.

But it was not their perseverance that we admire, so much as the spirit and temper with which they conducted themselves throughout the whole of their trials: they shewed a firmness that was invincible; but without petulance, without anger, without ostentation, without complaint. They acted, not from self-will, but from zeal for their Lord, and love to their fellow-creatures: and their glorying was, not from a proud conceit of being martyrs to their cause, but from a persuasion that to suffer any thing for Christ was the greatest honour that could possibly be conferred on mortal men; since it gave them an opportunity of manifesting their love to Christ, and rendered them conformable to his blessed image.]

Such being the example which they have set us, we would,

II. Recommend it to your imitation—

We are required to "be followers of them who through faith and patience now inherit the promises." Therefore let me commend to your imitation, *The principle* from which they acted, *the determination of heart* with which they obeyed that principle, *their view of the sufferings* they were called to endure, and *the manner in which they endured them.*

That we may all resemble them,

1. Let us get that love to Christ, which was the governing principle in their hearts—

[Without a supreme love to Christ, it is in vain to hope that we shall attain to any eminence in the divine life, or indeed to any real experience of it. We shall never be willing to endure much for him, much less be able to glory in sufferings and shame for his sake, if our hearts do not burn with love towards him from a sense of what he has done and suffered for us. This therefore is the first thing we are concerned to seek after: let us get the knowledge of Christ as our crucified, risen, and exalted Redeemer, and, under the constraining influence of his love, let us devote ourselves entirely to his service.]

2. Let us, like them, be steadfast in our obedience to the will of Christ—

[We shall find many things both from within and from without that will endanger our fidelity to Christ. But nothing must be suffered to divert us from the path of duty. We owe allegiance indeed to our governors in all things lawful; but if their commands be opposite to those of God, there can be no doubt whom we are to regard in preference, and to whose authority we must yield obedience. We must therefore arm ourselves equally against the allurements of inward temptation, and the terrors of outward persecution; and have it as an established principle in our hearts, that nothing is, on any account, to interfere with our duty to God.]

3. Let us, instead of dreading the cross, account it an honour to suffer for our Lord—

[Sooner or later we must have a cross to bear, if we will be followers of Christ. We may be screened for a time; but "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution." Nor should any be ashamed of the cross; but rather, as Moses and all the saints of old, accounted the reproach of Christ to be their honour, and loss for Christ their gain[a], so should *we* rejoice and leap for joy, if we be counted worthy to endure any thing for our blessed Lord[b]. To suffer for him is represented as a special favour conferred on us by God for Christ's sake; a favour equal, if not superior, to the gift of salvation itself[c]. In this light then let us view the cross; and we shall take it up with cheerfulness, and bear it with unshaken constancy.]

4. Let us very especially take heed to our spirit when we are under persecution—

[a] Heb. xi. 26. and x. 34. [b] Matt. v. 10—12. 1 Pet. iv. 12—16. [c] Phil. i. 29.

[It is no easy matter to unite firmness and constancy with meekness and love. We are in danger on the one hand of yielding to intimidation, or on the other hand, of indulging an angry, complaining, ostentatious, or vindictive spirit. It may be well therefore frequently to set before us the examples of our blessed Lord and his Apostles[d], that we may follow their steps, who returned nothing but blessing for curses, and fervent prayers for despiteful persecutions. The whole of our duty is contained in one short but comprehensive sentence (may God inscribe it on all our hearts!) "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good[e]."]

[d] 1 Pet. ii. 20—23. 1 Cor. iv. 12, 13. [e] Rom xii. 21.

OUTLINE NO. 1756

THE ZEAL OF MOSES.

Acts vii. 22, 23. *And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds. And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel.*

IT was urged against Stephen, that he was an enemy to Moses, and to the laws delivered by him. He, in vindicating himself against this charge, exalts Moses to the uttermost, as the greatest friend of Israel, who, at the peril of his life, and with the loss of all things, effected their deliverance from their bondage in Egypt.

In the hope that God, of his mercy, may raise up from amongst ourselves such friends to Israel, I will endeavour to shew,

I. The use to which Moses applied his distinguished talents—

Certainly his talents were of the most distinguished kind—

[In point of *rank*, he was second only to Pharaoh himself, in the whole Egyptian kingdom. Whether the government itself would ever have devolved on him, we cannot say: but, next to Pharaoh, he now possessed the greatest influence, and the most enlarged authority. His *acquirements* were of the very first order: "he was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians," who were at that time the most learned people upon earth. Solomon himself, who was wiser than all the

children of the east country, was commended especially by this, that "he excelled all the wisdom of Egypt[a]:" and, consequently, the character here given us of Moses, as "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians," is as elevated as any that could be given to mortal man. But to this was added *experience*, in all the most arduous affairs of state. When it is said, "he was mighty in words and in deeds," we are not to understand it of what he was subsequent to his mission to redeem Israel from their bondage; but of his previous state, whilst he was yet in Pharaoh's court, where he must of necessity find many occasions which called for peculiar wisdom in deliberation, and energy in action. At the same time, he was now *in the very prime of life;* not so young, as to act with thoughtless indiscretion; nor yet so old, as to be suspected of acting from a weariness of life, or a superstitious hope of meriting somewhat at the hands of God: he was forty years of age; at which time his judgment was fully matured: and, if he had affected worldly pleasures, he was fully capable of enjoying them with the richest zest, and for many years.]

Yet, with all these advantages, how did he employ them?

[Did he enjoy himself as one intent only on his own personal gratifications? No: he felt for the miseries of his oppressed brethren; and determined to interest himself in their behalf. He was aware that such a proceeding must be attended with great sacrifices on his part, and expose him to very imminent dangers. He must of necessity lose his place and situation in the court of Pharaoh; and, in uniting himself to the despised and persecuted Israelites, he could not fail to bring upon himself much reproach and suffering: yet, having weighed, as in a balance, the evils which he must endure against the benefits which he hoped to convey, "he refused to be called any longer the son of Pharaoh's daughter; and chose rather to suffer affliction with the people God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt[b]." The benevolent desire of delivering his people from their oppression having been conceived in his mind, he instantly addressed himself to that good work: and, "seeing one of them injured by an Egyptian, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand." But finding, the next day, that this action had been discovered, and knowing assuredly that, if he should be apprehended by Pharaoh, his life would be sacrificed, "he fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian[c]." How far the precise mode of carrying his desires into effect

[a] 1 Kings iv. 30. [b] Heb. xi. 24—26. [c] Exod. ii. 11—15.

was right, I presume not to judge. It is the desire of delivering his people, and not the mode of his attempting that deliverance, that is the object of my commendation: and that is held forth to us, by God himself, as worthy of our highest admiration.]

And now let us consider,

II. The light which his conduct reflects on the general subject of Missions—

Methinks it reflects great light,

1. On the need there is of Missions—

[The state of the Israelites in Egypt very strongly illustrates the state of mankind at large under the bondage of sin and Satan. Truly "the god of this world" rules over men with most tyrannic sway; "leading them captive at his will," and recompensing with nothing but evil their most laborious exertions. In one respect, the vassals of Satan are in a far worse predicament than they[d]; for they are unconscious of their bondage, and even love their chains. Not only where the darkness of heathenism prevails, but even where the light of Christianity shines, are men enslaved by their lusts and passions; and yet are ready to account their bondage liberty[e]; unconscious, too, in what that bondage will issue. To the miseries of oppressed Israel, so far at least as the cruel Egyptians could inflict them, death put a happy termination: but the slavery of Satan's vassals is leading them to chains of everlasting darkness. Say, then, whether there be not need for such to be instructed, and encouraged to cast off the yoke with which they are bound? Yes verily: and to exert ourselves for the diffusion of such light and liberty is an employment worthy of the most elevated of mankind. No talents can be improved to better purpose than in such acts of benevolence as these.]

2. On the spirit with which they should be undertaken—

[Moses regarded all the honours and riches of Egypt as nothing, when put into competition with the service of God, and the benefiting of mankind. Nay, not only did the sacrificing of all earthly comforts appear trivial in his eyes, but even life itself was judged by him as of small value, in comparison of the discharge of his duties to God and man. Now, thus should it be with us. Whatever we possess of earthly distinctions, we should account it of no value, but as it may

[d] *i. e.* Than the oppressed Israelites. [e] 2 Pet. ii. 19.

subserve the honour of God and the interests of our fellow-creatures. Instead of imagining that any elevation of rank exempts us from such labours, I hesitate not to say, that the possession of influence is itself a call for benevolent exertions; and the greater our talents are, the greater is the obligation upon us to improve them for our God. For every talent we possess we are responsible to God: and, if we are faithful in serving God to the utmost of our power, there is a glorious recompence awaiting us in the eternal world. "To this recompence we should have respect, even as Moses himself had:" and such a sense should we have of its transcendent excellency, that it should altogether swallow up all inferior considerations, and engage for God all the faculties we possess. These are the views with which a man should enter upon missionary labours, and the spirit with which he should pursue them: for then only can we embark in such a service with effect, when we engage in it with our whole hearts and our whole souls.]

3. On the success which may be hoped for by all who undertake them aright—

[Moses succeeded not at first. The very persons whom he sought to deliver were the first to "put him from them; saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us[e]?" And afterwards, when he was sent by God to deliver them, they only complained of him as occasioning their more augmented sorrows. And, after he had succeeded in bringing them into the wilderness, he found them only a rebellious and stiff-necked people, who loaded him with reproaches, and wished to return back again into Egypt[f]. Of all the adults that he brought out of Egypt, two only ever inherited the promised land. Yet did Moses account his labours well repaid, because in their posterity they enjoyed all that he had fondly hoped to confer on them. Now, in like manner shall all who engage in missions sooner or later see their labours crowned with success. They may have many trials at first, and may appear to labour a long time in vain. And after that they have gathered a Church, they may find much discouragement arising from the untowardness of their converts. Yet, let them only wait on God, and the seed which seems long unproductive shall spring up, and bring forth an abundant harvest. And in this shall the Christian missionary succeed, far beyond all that Moses could reasonably contemplate. The prospects of Moses *chiefly* terminated on the possession

[e] This was the sentiment, not of him only who addressed these words to him, but of the nation generally. Compare ver. 27. with ver. 35.

[f] Exod. v. 21.

of the promised land, and on the prosperity to be enjoyed there: whereas the Christian missionary knows assuredly, that every true convert shall possess, in due season, all the glory and felicity of heaven. And if his own converts be but few, still he has a consciousness that distant harvests may arise, when "the handful of corn which he cast on the top of the mountains shall shake like the woods of Lebanon, and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth[g]." And thus he has the consolation to hope, that "others more successful may enter into his labours; and that he who sowed, and those who reap, shall rejoice together in heaven for evermore."]

Let me now ASK,

1. Whence is it that Missionaries are so greatly wanting?

[The principles by which Moses was actuated were faith and love. "By faith," we are told, he embarked in this sacred cause, and executed his work with such fidelity[h]. But we are sadly defective in this grace. We see not with sufficient clearness the perishing condition of the heathen, and their need of that remedy which God has put into our hands. Nor do we feel that love for souls, which should overcome our self-love, and make us willing to give up ourselves to this difficult and self-denying work. We do not realize eternity as we ought. O! if we had just views of the eternal world, how empty would all earthly distinctions appear, and how important the work of missions! Dear brethren, we all have reason to be ashamed, and especially when we reflect on the wonders of redeeming love. How rich was the Lord Jesus Christ in the bosom of his Father; and yet, how poor did he become, that we, through his poverty, might be rich! *This* is the proper pattern for us to follow: and if once we be imbued with a sense of his love, we shall account it our highest honour to live and die for him.]

2. What is the best possible improvement of our talents—

[I am far from saying that all talent is to be directed in one channel. There is not any department of science wherein the most exalted talents may not be profitably employed. But, of all offices, that of a minister or a missionary is the most exalted. A minister, whether stationary, in the care of a single parish, or moving in the more extended field of a missionary, is the servant, the ambassador, the very representative of the Most High God; and, as such, has scope for

[g] Ps. lxxii. 16. [h] Heb. xi. 24.

all the talents that any man can possess. It is but too common amongst us to assign to youth of great promise those services whereby their temporal interests may be advanced, and to reserve for those of inferior capacity the service of God's sanctuary. But this is very dishonourable to God, and very injurious to the souls of men. Let the conduct of Moses shame us: and let us all, whatever our talents or influence may be, devote them all to the service of our God, and to the promotion of our Redeemer's kingdom. It is not indeed necessary that we relinquish the line of life in which divine Providence has called us: on the contrary, we are told to "abide in the calling wherein God has called us," yea, "therein to abide with God:" but, whatever our peculiar talents be, and in whatever department of the state they are exercised, let us consider the service of God, and of his people, as having the first claim upon us; and let no personal interest be considered as worthy of a thought, in comparison of God's honour, and the eternal welfare of mankind.]

OUTLINE NO. 1757

THE DEATH OF STEPHEN.

Acts vii. 59, 60. *And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*

OF all histories, that of the Christian Church is the most interesting, and particularly that part of it which is recorded by the inspired writers. There we behold every thing portrayed with perfect fidelity; nothing is concealed, nothing exaggerated. The writers appear unconcerned about any thing but the truth itself; from which they leave all persons to draw their own conclusions. Large sums of money arising from the sale of different estates were lodged in the hands of the Apostles for the use of the Church; and in a very little time they began to be suspected of partiality to the natives of Judea, in preference to the Jews of foreign extraction. This they relate with perfect indifference, together with the method adopted by them to prevent the distraction arising from too great a multiplicity of concerns. Then having told us who were chosen by the Church to superintend

their temporal concerns, they proceed to detail the history of one whose piety was most distinguished, and whose end was most glorious; and who, as being the first martyr in the Christian Church, was to be an example for the imitation of Christians in all future ages.

In relation to this history of Stephen, there are two things which we propose to notice;

I. The occasion of his death—

Being endowed with very eminent gifts, he maintained a controversy with the most learned Jews of different countries; and so confounded them with his arguments, that they had no alternative, but to acknowledge their errors, or to silence him by force. To this latter method they had recourse: they seized him, and brought him before the council, and accused him of blasphemy, that he might be put to death. In the chapter before us is contained his defence; which so irritated and inflamed them, that it stirred them up in a violent and tumultuous manner to take away his life. Let us consider distinctly its most prominent parts:

1. The statement—

[A superficial reader would scarcely see the scope and bearing of Stephen's argument: but the argument will be found plain and clear, if only we bear in mind what the accusation was. He was accused of blasphemy against Moses, and against the temple, and the law, because he had declared that the Lord Jesus would execute his judgments on the whole nation. For these declarations he had abundant warrant, from the prophecies contained in the Jewish Scriptures[a] — — — nor can we doubt but that, if he had been permitted to proceed in his argument without interruption, he would have proved every part of his assertions in the most convincing manner. But, as soon as they discerned the precise scope of his argument, they shewed such impatience as constrained him to break off abruptly in the midst of it. He had shewn them, that Abraham was chosen of God whilst he was yet an idolater in an idolatrous land; that he and his posterity served and enjoyed God, long before

[a] For the destruction of Jerusalem, see Jer. vii. 4, 7—14. and xxvi. 6—9, 12, 18. And for the change of "the customs," *i. e.* of the law itself, see Isai. lxv. 16. and lxvi. 19—21.

the law was given by Moses; that Moses himself was rejected by the people whom he was sent to deliver; that he also had directed the people to look for another Prophet who should arise after him, and whom they must obey at the peril of their souls. He then shewed, that whilst the temple was yet in all its glory, and its services were performed with the strictest regularity, God had spoken of the temple in the most disparaging terms, as unsuitable to the majesty of Him who filled heaven and earth[b].

Here the drift of his discourse began to appear: the people saw that their temple and its services were not necessary to the enjoyment of God's favour, and that they could afford no security to those who were disobedient to his word. Here therefore they manifested their wrathful indignation: which obliged him to drop the prosecution of his argument, and to proceed to]

2. The application of it to their hearts and consciences—

[Nothing could be more temperate or cautious than the foregoing discourse. But when Stephen saw the inveteracy of their prejudices, he changed his voice, and addressed them with an energy and fidelity that became a servant of the living God. They had indeed in their flesh the seal of God's covenant; but they were "uncircumcised in heart and ears," and "resisted the Holy Ghost," who both by his word and influence strove to bring them to a better mind. They professed to venerate the prophets; but they were following the steps of their forefathers, who had uniformly persecuted those whom God had sent to instruct and warn them: yea, they had been the betrayers and murderers of their Messiah himself: and though they pretended a great regard for the law, and professed to be actuated by a zeal for its honour, they had never been truly observant of its commands.

Such is the character of persecutors in general: they are full of pride and wrath, and are so blinded by prejudice as to be incapable of seeing the wickedness of their own hateful dispositions. Their zeal for God's honour is a mere pretence, a cover, and a plea for their own malignity. Look at them in every age, they all are actuated by the same spirit, and all tread in the same paths. Doubtless in addressing them we should first try what argument and persuasion will do; and we should exercise much patience towards them: but when we find that they shut their ears and harden their hearts against conviction, we should not be afraid to exhibit their conduct in its true light, or to set before them the judgments which they are bringing on their own souls.]

[b] Isai. lxvi. 1, 2.

3. The confirmation of it by an actual vision of Christ himself—

[They were sufficiently irritated by this reproof; "they were cut to the heart," even *as if they had been sawn asunder*[c]; and "they gnashed upon him with their teeth." But the preacher, "being filled with the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly to heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God:" and, being favoured with this vision, he declared to his persecutors what he saw. One might have hoped that this at least would have made them pause; but it inflamed even unto madness: "They cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him."

Here we see how inveterate is that prejudice which instigates men to oppose religion: nothing can satisfy them; nothing can convince them: and the stronger the evidence adduced for their conviction, the fiercer will be their rage against their monitors and reprovers.

We have here also a striking instance of that hypocrisy which usually characterizes the persecutors of religion. They would not stone him in the city, because God had ordered that blasphemers should be put out of the camp before they were stoned[d]: and they took care that the hands of the witnesses should be first upon him[e]: but they had not hesitated to suborn false witnesses against him; nor did they scruple to put to death a man whom they could not convict of any crime. Thus the murderers of our Lord would not venture to put into the treasury the money which Judas had returned, though they had been forward enough to give it him as the price for his Master's blood: thus also it is in every age; the haters of God will stop at nothing to accomplish their wicked purposes; but they will "strain out a gnat at the very time that they are swallowing a camel."

Here also we see how God supports his faithful servants. If he leave them in the hands of their enemies as it respects the body, he will supply them with consolations to support the soul. Stephen knew before that Jesus *was* at the right hand of God: but when he *saw him there*, and saw him "*standing*" there, ready to succour his oppressed servant, and to avenge his cause, his mind was fortified, and death was divested of all its terrors.]

Such was the occasion of Stephen's death. We now proceed to notice,

[c] διεπρίοντο. [d] Lev. xxiv. 14—16, 23. See also 1 Kings xxi. 13. [e] Deut. xvii. 6, 7.

II. The manner of it—

Violent as were the proceedings of his enemies, he was all composure. Behold,

1. His faith—

[He "knew in whom he had believed," and that "He was able to save him to the uttermost." He knew that the soul, when liberated from the body, would continue to exist; and that its felicity consisted in communion with Christ. To Christ therefore the blessed martyr now addressed himself in prayer, and committed his soul into the Saviour's hands. This was as solemn an act of worship as he could offer; for it was precisely the same as that which Christ himself had offered to his Father with his dying breath, when he said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Yet this act of worship was paid by Stephen to Christ, at the very time when he beheld the Father's glory, and at the very time that he was full of the Holy Ghost. How evident is it from hence that Christ is God equal with the Father! and how evident that a prospect of dwelling for ever in *his* presence will disarm death of its sting, and support the soul under the most cruel sufferings!

This is the faith which we should cultivate: this view of Jesus as an almighty and all-sufficient Saviour will quicken us to every duty, and strengthen us for every trial, and make us victorious over every enemy. Though appointed as "sheep for the slaughter, we shall be more than conquerors through Him that loved us."]

2. His love—

[In exact conformity to his Saviour's example, he died praying for his murderers; "Lord lay not this sin to their charge!" This shews how far he was from feeling any thing of resentment in the rebuke which he had before given them: and it shews that the utmost fidelity to the souls of men will consist with the most fervent love towards them. Well had this holy man learned the precepts of his Lord. O that we also might obtain the same grace to "bless them that curse us, and to pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us!" This is the test of real love. To love them that love us, is nothing: the vilest publicans will do that: but to love our enemies, to feel for them rather than for ourselves, to be tenderly concerned for them at the very moment that they are venting their utmost rage against us, and to be more anxious for the welfare of their souls than for the preservation of our own lives, *this* is Christian love; this is that love which is the fruit of the Spirit, the image of God, and the earnest of heaven in the soul. Possessed of such a spirit, we need not fear what man can do unto us; for even the most violent

death will be to us only as reclining on a bed to sleep. Stephen, with this grace in his heart, and this prayer upon his lips, "fell asleep."]

Here then let the world JUDGE;

1. Whether there be not an excellency in true religion?

[We acknowledge that many heathens have shewn a wonderful composure in death, yea, and a joyous exultation in it also: but then they have been borne up by pride and vanity, and the hope of man's applause: no instance ever occurred of such an end as Stephen's, except among the worshippers of Jehovah. Nothing but divine grace can give such meekness and fortitude, such faith and love, such tranquillity and joy, as Stephen manifested in that trying hour. On the other hand, divine grace will produce these things wherever it reigns in the soul: in proportion to the measure of any man's grace will be his proficiency in these virtues. Compare then the spiritual man with one who is yet under the influence of his corrupt nature; compare, for instance, the mind of Paul after his conversion to the faith of Christ, with its state whilst he was keeping the raiment of Stephen's murderers. Such a comparison would in one instant convince us, that there is a wonderful efficacy in the Gospel of Christ, and that a person under its full influence is as superior to others as the solar light is to the twinkling of the obscurest star.]

2. Whether the true Christian be not the happiest man?

[On the one side are proud and persecuting zealots; on the other are the meek followers of a crucified Saviour. Look at the frame of their minds; the one all rage and violence; the other all sweetness and composure. Let any man, with the Bible in his hand, survey that scene which we have just contemplated; and say, Whether he would not infinitely prefer the state of Stephen with all his sufferings, to that of his persecutors satiated with his blood? A man through cowardice may draw back from sufferings; but no man can doubt which of these parties was in the more enviable state: and how much less could he doubt it if he were to survey them in their present state; the one exulting in his Saviour's bosom, and the other receiving the just recompence of their sins? O let all, whether oppressors or oppressed, contemplate this, and then make their election, "Whose they will be, and whom they will serve."]

OUTLINE NO. 1758

PHILIP PREACHES CHRIST IN SAMARIA.

Acts viii. 5—8. *Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city.*

NO sooner was the Gospel preached with success, than Satan stirred up persecution against it; determined, if possible, to crush and annihilate the infant Church. But what he designed for the destruction of Christianity, God overruled for its speedier propagation, and its firmer establishment. The persecution which commenced with the death of Stephen was so bitter, that the new converts were constrained to flee from Jerusalem, in order to escape its violence; the Apostles alone daring to brave the storm. But the Christians who fled to all the surrounding country, carried the Gospel along with them, and published it in every place: and the very circumstance of their being persecuted on account of it, rendered them more earnest in spreading the knowledge of it, and gave it a deeper interest among the people to whom they spake. Philip, who, like Stephen, was one of the seven deacons, fled with the rest, and went down to Samaria: and there was made a happy instrument of diffusing widely the knowledge of his Lord and Saviour.

From the account given of him in our text, we are led to notice,

I. The subject of his discourses—

The "preaching of Christ" is a term commonly used in Scripture for the publishing of the Gospel in all its parts: it is said of the Apostles, that "daily, in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach, and preach Jesus Christ." Respecting Philip's discourses we are more fully informed; for "he

preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ[a]." He shewed them,

1. Concerning the kingdom of God—

[This kingdom had been distinctly spoken of by the prophets, as to be established in due time: and the Gentiles, as well as Jews, expected the erection of it about that time. The person to whom the throne of David belonged was now come; and, though rejected and crucified by his own subjects, he had set up a kingdom which should never be moved. His empire indeed was not like those of the world, but was altogether spiritual; it was established in the hearts of men, and was founded in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Into this kingdom all are called; and all who would be saved must become the subjects of it, giving up themselves to Christ, as their only Governor and Redeemer.

This is the instruction which ministers in every age must give to those whom they address in the name of Christ. None can properly be called the *natural* subjects of this kingdom: for all by nature are subjects of Satan's kingdom, and must be conquered by divine grace, before they will submit to the government of Christ: as the Apostle expresses it, they are "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son." This then is the message, which, as God's ambassadors, we declare to you in his name: you must all throw down the weapons of your rebellion, and submit yourselves to Christ, to be saved wholly by his grace, and to be governed wholly by his laws — — —]

2. Concerning the name of Jesus Christ—

[To the Apostles this name was more precious than words can possibly express: it was the foundation of all their hopes, and the source of all their joys. They had seen the efficacy of this name to produce the most astonishing effects; and they knew that "there was no other name given under heaven whereby men could be saved." Hence they strove to commend the Lord Jesus to the whole world, proclaiming him in all his offices, and magnifying him as the Saviour of a ruined world — — — And what other theme is there so delightful to his ministers in all ages? To honour him, and exalt him, and commend him to the world, is the great office of a minister; and then is his ministry most successful, when he can be instrumental to the making HIM known and loved and honoured by the world at large — — —]

3. That Christ had now established his kingdom upon earth—

[a] ver. 12.

[It was well known, from the prophetic writings, that the Messiah was to come, and to erect an universal empire in the world. This Messiah was come; and Jesus had proved, by the most unquestionable evidence, that he was the person so long foretold, and so earnestly desired[b]. These proofs Philip doubtless set before them — — — and declared to them the nature of that kingdom which was now established: it was not indeed such as the carnal Jews had expected, and such as existed among the heathen; it was a spiritual kingdom erected in the hearts of men, and consisting "in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost" — — —]

4. That of this they might all become the happy subjects—

[Satan had usurped dominion over mankind, and had held his vassals in the sorest bondage: but his power was broken: Christ had "triumphed over him upon the cross, and had spoiled all the principalities and powers" of hell. By making atonement for sin, Christ had reconciled men to their offended God, and had obtained for them the privilege of becoming his sons. This privilege Philip held forth to them as of inestimable value, and as to be secured simply by faith in the Lord Jesus. In urging this point, no doubt he opened fully the riches of grace and love that are in Christ Jesus: and entreated all the people to embrace his proffered salvation. He would expatiate largely on the privileges which all the subjects of this kingdom should enjoy; their security from all evil, their possession of all good: in a word, he magnified the Lord Jesus Christ among them, as the only, and all-sufficient Saviour of a ruined world.]

This testimony he confirmed by miracles, which operated strongly to the conviction of their minds; as we shall see, whilst we consider,

II. The effect of his ministrations—

It is supposed by many, that the Gospel is productive only of melancholy: but far different was its fruit in Samaria; for "there was great joy," it is said, "in that city." But whence did their joy proceed? We answer,

1. From the temporal benefits by which the Gospel was confirmed—

[These were certainly very great, and gave much occasion for joy, even among those who had no spiritual perception of

[b] Hagg. ii. 7.

its excellency. It could not fail to rejoice all who were related to the persons on whom the miraculous cures were effected, yea, and all too who had any measure of benevolence in their hearts.

And there is similar ground for joy wherever the light of the Gospel shines; for it banishes many dark and wicked superstitions, infanticide, parricide, the burning of women at the funeral of their husbands, together with innumerable other cruel and horrid practices. And still more, wherever the Gospel is preached with power, the people at large, as well as those who feel its influence, have reason to rejoice in it: for there all benevolent institutions are set on foot; the education of poor children, and their instruction in the faith of Christ, are attended to; societies are formed for the visiting of the sick, and the relief of the needy; and the general tone of morals is raised: and all these are, to the ungodly, (what miracles were in the days of old,) evidences of the truth and excellency of that Gospel, which produces such fruits.

We admit therefore that the miraculous cures were to them one source of joy: and we affirm, that every city into which the Gospel now comes, has, on similar grounds, good reason for a joyful reception of it.]

2. From the spiritual benefits which they experienced in their own souls—

[Multitudes of them, who had long been "led captive by the devil at his will," now had their chains broken, and were "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son." A sense of God's pardoning love was now shed abroad in their hearts; and they had "a Spirit of adoption given them, whereby they could cry, Abba, Father." Now they were brought as it were into a new world; "old things passed away, and all things were become new:" they had new views, new desires, new pursuits, new joys, even such as they never before had the least idea of. Can we wonder then that their "joy was great?" The Gospel, when published by angels at the Saviour's birth, was proclaimed as "glad tidings of great joy to all people:" and the prophets had all with one voice represented it in the same light[c] — — — And we can appeal to all who have ever tasted its sweetness, that it is indeed "a feast of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined."]

3. From the eternal benefits which were opened to their view—

[c] For the spiritual benefit see Isai. xxxv. 1, 2. and lv. 12, 13. And for the joy excited by it quote Isai. xliv. 23. and *the whole* 98th Psalm.

[The kingdom into which believers are brought, is but the commencement of that which is perfected in heaven. The peace and holiness which are enjoyed here, are the blossom which will be brought to maturity in a better world. Grace is glory begun; and glory is grace consummated. Besides, the subjects of the Redeemer's kingdom will each have a crown and kingdom of his own: "the glory which his Father has given him, he has bestowed on them:" they all without exception are "kings and priests unto God;" and "they shall reign for ever and ever." Who must not rejoice in such a prospect as this? Truly if, with such a view of the happiness laid up for us in the eternal world, we did not rejoice, we should be more stupid than beasts, more insensible than stones. But no one can be "begotten again to a lively hope of this inheritance," without feeling in his soul a heaven begun, and "rejoicing in Christ with a joy unspeakable and glorified[d]."]

APPLICATION—

1. Who then amongst us desires this joy?

[Behold how the Samaritans obtained it: they "with one accord gave heed unto the things which Philip spake:" and the same attention to the Gospel now will be productive of the same effects. The Gospel which we preach is the same as was preached by him: we "preach Christ unto you:" we preach him as "the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last," the "All in all" in the salvation of man. O "give earnest heed to what the Scripture declares" concerning him[e]; treasure it up in your minds, and live upon it in your hearts[f]; and it shall operate, as it did in them, to your present and eternal welfare.]

2. Are there any amongst us who experience this joy?

[Then endeavour to "walk worthy of Him who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory[g]." To this we would exhort you with paternal authority and love[h]. Do you ask, *How* you are to walk worthy of him? we answer, By uniting closely with each other in faith and love[i], and being increasingly fruitful in every good work[k]. Let it be remembered, that this is the very end for which "God has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light," that you should "shew forth his praise," and glorify his name.]

[d] 1 Pet. i. 3—5, 8, 9. [e] Heb. ii. 1. [f] Heb. iv. 2.
[g] 1 Thess. ii. 12. [h] 1 Thess. ii. 11. [i] Phil. i. 27.
[k] Col. i. 10.

OUTLINE NO. 1759

THE STATE OF UNGODLY MEN.

Acts viii. 23. *I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.*

IT is no real disparagement to the Gospel of Christ, if some hypocrites be found among the professors of religion. This has been the case in every age of the Church, even when the temptations to hypocrisy were far less than they are at present. There was a Judas among the twelve Apostles, and a Simon Magus among the converts of Philip. Simon had appeared sincere in his professions of faith, and therefore Philip had baptized him. He had attached himself with admiration to Philip's ministry[a], and therefore the true Christians regarded him as a brother: but he soon discovered the hypocrisy of his heart, and shewed that notwithstanding his pretensions to conversion and grace, he was still, as much as ever, in a state of nature. Hence Peter addressed him in the words of the text. In discoursing on them we shall inquire,

I. What is the state here described?

The various terms here used are not unfrequent in the Holy Scriptures[b]. They import,

1. A state of subjection to sin—

[Nothing can so justly be termed "gall" as sin. It is indeed the bitterest gall, and the sorest bondage. Men may "roll it as a sweet morsel under their tongue, but they invariably find it gall in the stomach:" it may please them for a time, but at last "it will bite like a serpent and sting like an adder." Let those, whose conscience is at all awakened, testify respecting this. Whether we be penitent or not, if our sin have found us out, if will prove a bitter cup. Peter wept bitterly at the remembrance of his guilt; and Judas, who was not a real penitent, could not even endure his own existence, when his conscience upbraided him with the act he had committed. And a dreadful vassalage it is to be led captive by sin. No slave in the universe is so much an object of pity, as

[a] ver. 13.
[b] Deut. xxix. 18. and xxxii. 32. Heb. xii. 15. Isai. lviii. 6.

he who "for a morsel of meat sells his birthright," and for a momentary gratification consigns his soul over to perdition.]

2. A state of condemnation on account of sin—

[This necessarily accompanies the former. There is no freedom from condemnation where there is bondage to sin. Christ came not to save his people *in* their sins, but *from* them: and the certainty of punishment is that, which renders sin so bitter and so formidable. Were there no future account to be given of our actions, the bonds of iniquity would lose their terror: but it is the thought of hell that gives a poignancy to the accusations of conscience, and makes the sinner tremble at the prospect of death and judgment, and often wish for utter annihilation. We say not that every sinner feels such anguish of soul (for many are "past feeling, having seared their consciences as with an hot iron"), but we are sure that they would do so if they knew their state, and will do so the very instant they enter into the invisible world. They are *therefore* in the gall of bitterness, *because* "the wrath of God abideth on them."]

That this is the lamentable condition of many amongst us will appear, if we inquire,

II. Who may evidently be "perceived" to be in that state?

While some are manifestly in a very different state, and the condition of others is dubious, there are some who are indisputably in the state just described—

1. They who are yet under the dominion of their former lusts—

[Simon had lately been a sorcerer, but upon embracing Christianity had ceased from the practice of his magic arts. Nevertheless his desire of gain and his love of man's applause were altogether unmortified. Hence when a prospect of aggrandizing himself opened to his view, he was ready to return to his former course of life. Nor did he regard what means he used, provided he might but attain his end. And are there not too many amongst ourselves who are yet addicted to their former lusts? Are not many, who in the days of their ignorance were proud, passionate, unforgiving, still prone to relapse into their former sins the very instant that any temptation occurs? Are not many as earthly, sensual, and devilish, in their tempers and dispositions as ever? Let them then not deceive themselves—their state may be easily and clearly "perceived." It was by such marks that Peter knew beyond a doubt the state of Simon; and by such may the state of every professor in the universe be determined. If they

practise, or desire to practise, the same iniquities that they did in their unenlightened state, they are surely "in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity." "Whosoever allowedly committeth sin is most unquestionably the servant of sin," and the child "of the devil[c]."]

2. They who pursue religion for carnal ends—

[Simon earnestly desired the power of conferring the Holy Ghost, and would have given a sum of money to obtain it. But from what motive did this spring? Was he desirous of honouring Christ, or of benefiting his fellow-creatures? No: he only desired to advance his own reputation and interest. Alas! how many are there who follow Christ from no better motive! They hope that by mixing with the society of God's people they shall promote their temporal interests. They wish to be caressed by religious persons, and to be held in reputation for their sanctity and zeal. They do not merely, as even sincere Christians too often do, feel a mixture of principle within them, which they mourn over and resist; but they act uniformly from selfish motives, and with a view to their own ease, interest, or honour. Need we ask the state of such people? It may be too easily "perceived." Like those who follow Christ for the loaves and fishes, they are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity.]

3. They who are not attentive to their thoughts as well as their actions—

[Many, from the customs of the world, take care to regulate their outward actions, while their thoughts range at liberty and without controul. Simon conceived the thought of purchasing the power of conferring the Holy Ghost; and, instead of mortifying, indulged it. Peter, in his reproof, bade him particularly "pray, if perhaps the thought of his heart might be forgiven him;" and perceived by this thought, which he had so unadvisedly divulged, that his "heart was not right in the sight of God, and that he had no part or lot in the Gospel salvation." And may not many amongst ourselves draw the same conclusion from the vain thoughts that lodge within them? We are well aware that the best of men may have sinful thoughts rushing into their minds; but will they harbour them? No: every true Christian may say as in the presence of God, "I hate vain thoughts." But they, who "regard iniquity in their hearts," are in a state of desperate delusion. God, who searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins, "will bring every secret thing into judgment," and acquit or condemn, according as he sees the prevailing bent of the

[c] John viii. 34, 44. and 1 John iii. 8.

heart. If then our "thoughts be not so far captivated to the obedience of Christ" that we cherish those that are holy, and mortify all that are corrupt, we may perceive beyond a doubt that we are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity.]

INFER—

1. What need is there for the professors of religion to examine their own hearts!

[Simon had been approved by his fellow-creatures, and even by an inspired servant of God. From hence doubtless he would augur well respecting his own state. Yet in the midst of all he only deceived his own soul. What need then have we to examine ourselves! The approbation of men is but a small matter. It is not he who commendeth himself, or is commended by others, but he whom the Lord commendeth, that shall stand before him with approbation in the last day[d]. Judge yourselves then, brethren, that ye be not judged of the Lord. Examine not your actions only, but your *desires*, your *motives*, and your *thoughts*. By these will God determine your state in the last day; nor shall any but the upright in heart be accepted of him.]

2. What reason have true Christians to rejoice—

[The declaration made to Simon intimated that no true Christian was in *his* state. Blessed thought! If we really believe in Jesus, and experience the purifying efficacy of that faith, we have nothing to fear. The bonds of sin are broken asunder. Nor shall one drop of the cup of bitterness be ever tasted by us to all eternity. Rejoice, believer, in thy Deliverer: thou once wast in the state of Simon, a miserable, enslaved, condemned sinner; but now "the Son hath made thee free, and thou art free indeed." "There is no condemnation to thee since thou art in Christ Jesus." Rejoice evermore; but endeavour still to maintain a guard over thy words and thoughts. "Seek not great things for thyself," nor "the honour that cometh of man." Be more solicitous about graces than about gifts. And whatever God hath bestowed on thee, labour to improve it, not for thine own glory, but for the good of men and the glory of God. Thus shall it be evidently "perceived" that thou art in the way of peace, and thou shalt receive the plaudit of thy Lord himself in the day of judgment.]

[d] 2 Cor. x. 18.

OUTLINE NO. 1760

PHILIP AND THE EUNUCH.

Acts viii. 35. *Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.*

IF God have designs of love and mercy towards any person, he will be at no loss for means whereby to accomplish them. We can have no doubt but that the Ethiopian Eunuch was chosen, like the Apostle Paul, even from his mother's womb; yet had he left Jerusalem, where all the Apostles were assembled, without obtaining any knowledge of Christ Jesus. Moreover, he was now going to his own country, where the light of the Gospel had never shone, and where he seemed to be altogether beyond its reach. But God, by an angel, ordered Philip to go into the desert, through which the Eunuch was travelling; and then, by his Spirit, directed him to join himself to his carriage; that so he might communicate to him the knowledge he stood in need of, and lead him to the enjoyment of everlasting life.

The Eunuch was reading an interesting portion of Scripture, which he did not understand: and Philip, at his request, went up into the chariot with him, and expounded it to him.

The points to which we would draw your attention are,

I. The passage expounded—

[This is one of the most important passages in all the prophetic writings. The prophets indeed all speak of Christ in some measure; but Isaiah more than any other; insomuch that he has been called, The Evangelical Prophet: but of all his writings, there is not any other part so full, so plain, so rich as this: it might be rather taken for a history of past events, than a prophecy of things to come; so minute and circumstantial is it, in all that relates to the person, character, and office of Jesus Christ.

The precise words which the Eunuch was reading, are a part of a discourse or prophecy beginning at the 13th verse of the 52d chapter of Isaiah, and extending to the close of the 53d chapter. Some difficulty in the explanation of them

arises from a difference between the Hebrew copies, and the Septuagint translation, from which the words were quoted: though in fact the sense in both is nearly the same; namely, that the person there spoken of was treated with the utmost injustice; that no one would offer a single word in his defence; and that he was cut off as a malefactor. The main difficulty in the Eunuch's mind was, to ascertain "of whom the prophet spake; whether of himself, or of some other person:" and this is a difficulty which the modern Jews are unable to surmount. The ancient Jews admitted, that the whole discourse related to the Messiah: but since the Messiah has come and fulfilled that prophecy, the Jews interpret it as referring to their nation, who were punished for their offences. But the most superficial reader will see in a moment the absurdity of such an interpretation: for we are told again and again, that the person who suffered, suffered for the sins of others, and not for his own; and that "by his stripes the people of God were healed." So plain is the prophet's whole discourse, that nothing but the most inveterate prejudice can prevent any man from seeing its accomplishment in Jesus Christ: and we trust, that, at a future period, it will be the principal source of conviction to the whole Jewish nation, and make them, as it did the Eunuch in his own country, instrumental to the salvation of the heathen world.]

Such is the passage which Philip undertook to explain. Let us next consider,

II. The exposition given—

["He began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." Of course he would explain the terms, and shew the perfect accomplishment of them in Jesus, together with the impossibility of referring them to any other person. This was the method which Peter adopted on the day of Pentecost, when he shewed that David's prophecy relative to the resurrection of Christ could not be interpreted of David himself, but was actually fulfilled in Christ[a]. Now this passage would afford him a fair opportunity of declaring every thing relating to Christ, as far as the time would admit, and the occasion required. The *person* of Christ, as God's Son and "Servant[b];" his unparalleled *sufferings*[c]; *the vicarious nature of those sufferings*[d]; (seeing that he had no sin of his own, but suffered under the load of our sins[e];) his *resurrection* to a new and heavenly life[f]; his prevailing *intercession* for us at the right hand of God[g]; and all *the victories of his grace* in the

[a] Acts ii. 25—36. [b] Isai. lii. 13. and liii. 11.
[c] Isai. lii. 14. and liii. 3. [d] Isai. liii. 4—6. [e] Isai. liii. 9, 10.
[f] Isai. liii. 12. [g] Isai. liii. 12.

conversion and salvation of a ruined world[h]: and lastly, *the certainty of salvation to all who should know, and believe on him*[i]: these, and many other glorious truths, he would have occasion to open to him, as lying on the very surface of the prophecy he was contemplating: and these truths well understood, and received into the heart as the ground of our hopes before God, are sufficient for every end and purpose of man's salvation. What can be added to them to relieve a doubting mind? In the atonement and intercession of Christ there is all that is necessary to satisfy an offended God, and consequently to satisfy and heal a wounded conscience. What can be added to stimulate us to holy obedience? If the wonders of redeeming love will not operate effectually on our hearts, nothing will; we must be "past feeling," "given over to a reprobate mind."

"From this passage then we would preach Jesus unto you." O contemplate what he has done and suffered for you! — — — think also of what he is yet doing for you in heaven — — — and let him now "see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied" in the conversion and salvation of your souls — — —]

The excellence of his instructions may be judged of by,

III. The effect produced—

[The Eunuch's eyes were opened, and he saw "that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God." Instantly therefore did he determine to surrender up himself to him as a faithful follower and servant: and, understanding that baptism was the rite whereby he must be admitted into covenant with him, he desired to have that rite administered to him without delay: which desire Philip hesitated not to comply with, as soon as he was convinced that his views of Christ were such as qualified him for admission into the Christian Church.

Who must not admire the decision of character here manifested. The situation of the Eunuch, as a leading person in a great empire, might seem to have justified his deferring such a step, till he had viewed it in all its bearings, and formed his judgment upon the maturest consideration. But his mind and conscience were convinced; and he would not give opportunity to Satan to get advantage over him: he therefore "conferred not with flesh and blood," but gave himself up instantly and unreservedly to God.

After he was baptized, and Philip was in a miraculous manner separated from him, "he went on his way rejoicing." And well might he rejoice in having found such a Saviour, and

[h] Isai. liii. 10—12. [i] Isai. liii. 1, 11.

in all the rich communications of grace and peace which were now imparted to his soul — — —]

Such being the effect of this blessed interview, let us

LEARN,

1. To improve our leisure in reading the Holy Scriptures—

[The Eunuch, though so great a man, thought it not unworthy of him to study the word of God; nor, though occupied with the affairs of a kingdom, did he plead a pressure of business for the neglect of it: nor, though he found it beyond the reach of his understanding, did he cast it away as unintelligible: but regarding it as inspired of God, he searched into it with humility and diligence. Let us then follow his example: let us not plead, that it is the proper study of ministers only, or that we have not time to study it, or ability to understand it; but let us account it our delight to meditate on the word, on the Sabbath-day especially, and at all other times, whenever the necessary business of our respective callings will admit of it — — —]

2. To avail ourselves of every opportunity of instruction—

[Philip probably appeared but in a humble garb, such as befitted his employment, and the persecuted state of the Church at that time: but the Eunuch did not disdain to ask instruction from him, or to invite him up into his chariot for the purpose of obtaining it. He wisely judged, that they are the best instructors who are themselves taught of God: and, conceiving that Philip was better acquainted with the Scripture than himself, he gladly availed himself of the opportunity which his presence afforded him. Let us in like manner seek, whether from men or books, all possible information concerning the will of God: and let us remember, that, as the Eunuch had gained no saving knowledge at Jerusalem, where all the Apostles were, yet found it in the desert, so may we be guided into all truth by the instrumentality of persons from whom we might least expect so rich a boon. "God will divide to every man severally as he will," and by whom he will.]

3. To follow the convictions of our own conscience—

[As soon as the Eunuch saw the path of duty, he followed it. He had before, from heathenism become a Jew; and now, from being a Jew, he embraced Christianity. Now he might well have suspected that all the courtiers in his own country would accuse him of unpardonable weakness and versatility:

but he regarded not the judgment of man: he desired and determined to approve himself to the heart-searching God: and it was in consequence of this that he went on his way rejoicing. If he had halted in his mind, or indulged the fear of man, he would not have been favoured with those sublime and heavenly joys: but "those who faithfully serve God, God will honour." Let us then, like Caleb and Joshua, "follow the Lord fully:" if we stand alone, like Elijah, let us not be ashamed; but whatever God requires us to do, let us do it instantly and without reserve.]

OUTLINE NO. 1761

THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH'S CONFESSION.

Acts viii. 37. *I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*

CIRCUMSTANCES, apparently casual, are often productive of the most important results. The Ethiopian Eunuch, a proselyte, "had been up to Jerusalem to worship;" and, on his return homewards, was reading a portion of the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. Philip, who was at that time at Samaria, was ordered by an angel to go southward, towards Gaza. In this journey he saw the Eunuch, sitting in his chariot, and reading: and, being directed by the Holy Spirit to go and join himself to the chariot, he did so; and, at the Eunuch's request, went up and sat with him in his chariot, and explained to him the portion of Scripture which he was reading. The Holy Spirit then accompanied the word with power to the Eunuch's soul: and Philip, on the Eunuch's expressing a wish to enter into the Christian Church by baptism, admitted him to that ordinance, having first heard from him this open confession, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God[a]."

Now, at first sight, there appears little that is interesting in this acknowledgment. But we shall find it highly instructive, if we consider it, as we ought,

I. As a summary of Christian doctrines—

Such it has been regarded on all occasions. Nathanael addressed our Lord in terms precisely similar:

[a] ver. 26—28.

"Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel[b]." And Peter also, in his own name and that of all the Apostles, said, "We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the Living God[c]." In these expressions all of them intended to convey a general view of their creed; and not of their speculative opinions merely, but of the most influential convictions of their souls. The avowal in my text was given in answer to that question, "Dost thou *believe with all thine heart?*" It must be understood, therefore, as comprehending,

1. A simple affiance in Christ—

[This, of necessity, is comprehended in it: for to what end would it be, to acknowledge Christ as the Messiah, if we do not rely upon him in that capacity? The devils could say of him, "We know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God;" but they had no hope in him, nor could they derive any benefit from him. True faith brings us to Christ for salvation; causes us to renounce every other hope; and engages us to rely on him as our "All in all"———]

2. An unreserved devotion to him—

[If we believe in Christ as having redeemed us by his blood, we must also of necessity surrender up ourselves to him as his peculiar people. Has he offered himself a sacrifice *for* us; we must "offer up ourselves as living sacrifices *to* him[d]." To call him Lord, Lord, without doing his holy will, would only delude us to our ruin. If we believe that "he has bought us with a price, we must glorify him with our body and our spirit, which are his[e]."]

But this confession must also be considered by us,

II. As a qualification for Christian privileges—

In this precise view it was uttered by the Eunuch. He applied for Christian baptism: and this question was put to him as a test, "Dost thou believe with all thine heart? If so, thou mayest." Now this is, to all, a necessary qualification,

1. For baptism—

[Children cannot, in their own persons return an answer to this question; and therefore the question is put to their

[b] John i. 49. [c] John vi. 69. [d] Rom. xii. 1. [e] 1 Cor. vi. 20.

sponsors; who have no right to appear as sponsors, unless they can answer it from their hearts, as the Eunuch did. And they bind themselves to contribute, as much as in them lies, to the instilling of these principles into the minds of the children whom they thus present to the Lord. And the children themselves, when they come to an age capable of comprehending the engagements thus made for them, are bound to take them upon themselves; and, when confirmed by the bishop, they do actually take them upon themselves; professing, each for himself, his belief in Christ; and devoting himself entirely to the service of his Lord. And in this view, the ordinance of confirmation, as administered in the Established Church, is of the utmost importance to be well improved by ministers, for the benefit of their flocks; and by young people, for the everlasting benefit of their own souls.]

2. For the Lord's Supper—

[To come to the Lord's table, as many do, at the three great festivals of the Church, and to neglect it all the year besides, is to shew at once, that they enter not into the true spirit of that ordinance. And to attend it *as a test for the holding of a public office*, is an horrible abuse of it; which, we thank God, is now abolished. But, for judging of ourselves, whether we be in a state fit to attend upon that divine ordinance, we cannot conceive a better test than this, which Philip here administered. In coming to the table of the Lord, we profess to feed upon the body of Christ which was broken for us, and the blood of Christ which was shed for the remission of our sins; and to dedicate ourselves to him afresh, as his devoted servants. If we do not this in reality, we only deceive our own souls. Here, however, it may be useful to mark what the proper medium is, in the application of this test to persons as a qualification for attending upon the table of the Lord. The Church of England, in her practice at least, is too lax; whilst those who dissent from her are too rigid. That minute inquiry, into what is called *the experience* of individuals, and persons sitting in judgment upon it, goes far beyond what is authorized by Scripture. The Apostle says, "Let a man examine *himself*, (not stand up to be examined by *others*,) and *so* let him come[f]." The true medium is that which Philip observed: and if the Eunuch had answered falsely, as Simon Magus unhappily did[g], the blame must have rested on himself alone. But I cannot too earnestly exhort every one of you to put the question to himself with deep sincerity; and never to approach the table of the Lord but under a sense of your entire dependence upon Christ, both for "mercy to pardon, and for grace to help you in the time of need."]

[f] 1 Cor. xi. 28. [g] ver. 20, 21.

In fact, this view of Christ is never duly appreciated, unless it be regarded,

III. As a title to all Christian blessings—

[Nothing but faith in Christ is necessary for salvation. (Of course, I speak not of it as a speculative assent, but as an operative and influential principle, such as we have represented it under our first head.) So it was declared to be by St. Paul, and by our Lord Jesus Christ himself[h]. Such it was declared to be in the commission given by him to his Apostles[i]. Such it was proclaimed to be in the answer given to the inquiring Jailer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved[k]." By this are we made children of the Living God[l]. By this we obtain peace to our own souls[m]. By this are we sanctified from the power of sin[n]. And by this are we made partakers of the kingdom of heaven[o]. Without this operative faith, nothing under heaven will prevail for any man's salvation. Not Paul himself, in his unconverted state, could have been saved without it[p]. On the other hand, no man, whatever he may have been or done, can perish, not even Manasseh himself, if he come to God with a simple faith in the Lord Jesus: for we are assured, that "the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all sin[q]," and that "all who believe in him shall be justified from all things[r]."]

Now, then, permit me to INQUIRE, brethren,

1. What is the state of your souls in relation to this all-important matter?

[Can you, in the very way that the Eunuch did, declare, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?" I ask not, Whether you approve of that *as an article of your creed?* but whether it forms the one ground of all your hopes, the one source of all your happiness? Dear brethren, be not satisfied with repeating it in your creed; but get it fixed as a rooted and influential principle in your hearts——— You must acquire it, even as the Eunuch did, by a diligent study of the Holy Scriptures, and by the teaching of the Spirit of God———]

2. What effect does it produce on your hearts and lives?

[You see what effects this faith produced on the Eunuch, how he *desired* baptism, and *devoted himself to the Lord*, with-

[h] Gal. v. 6. John iii. 14—16, 18, 36.
[i] Mark xvi. 16.
[k] Acts xvi. 31.
[l] John i. 12. Gal. iii. 26.
[m] Rom. v. 1.
[n] Acts xv. 9.
[o] Rev. i. 5.
[p] 1 Cor. iii. 11.
[q] 1 John i. 7.
[r] Acts xiii. 39.

out ever once considering what effect this conduct might have on his earthly prospects. Like Moses, he esteemed the "reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Ethiopia," and greater honour than all that Candace could confer upon him. And to him it became a source of the sublimest joy, such as he had never experienced in all his life before: "He went on his way rejoicing[s]." Let me then ask, whether your faith operate in this way on you? It *should* so operate: it *will* so operate, if it be genuine. O that all of you might go to your respective homes this day, in the very spirit in which the Eunuch prosecuted his journey! God brought Philip to him for this end. And who can tell, but that God has brought us also together for the same blessed end at this time? Dear brethren, rest not till your faith fill you with the same heavenly joy; nor ever cease to wrestle with God in prayer, till he make you like monuments of his grace on earth, and like heirs of his glory in a better word.]

[s] ver. 39.

OUTLINE NO. 1762

CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.

Acts ix. 3—6. *And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*

IT has pleased God to give us every evidence of the truth of our religion, that the most scrupulous mind could desire. The proofs arising from prophecies and miracles, are such as to carry irresistible conviction to every candid inquirer. But suppose a sceptical person to wish for further proof, and to say, 'Let me see a man, who, being fully competent to judge of the question, and decidedly hostile to Christianity in his heart, is yet convinced at last of its truth: let me see him, while yet all the opportunities of detecting imposture are open to him, embracing Christianity himself, and propagating it with all his might, and braving death in its most tremendous

forms in support of it: then I shall be indeed convinced that it is of Divine original:' I say, suppose a person unreasonable enough to desire such a proof, and determining, like Thomas, not to believe, till this evidence has been afforded him; we would meet him on his own ground, and produce him precisely such an instance as he requires. In the conversion of the Apostle Paul all these things unite: and, from the frequency with which that event is related in the Scriptures, it seems to have been intended by God as a strong confirmation of the truth of our religion. In the passage before us, it is stated by the historian: but, in two other places, it is related by St. Paul himself; who adduces the circumstances that attended it as an unquestionable proof of his own Divine mission, and of the truth of that Gospel which he preached.

In considering St. Paul's conversion, we shall notice it in different points of view;

I. As a record for our instruction—

To enumerate the particular truths illustrated and confirmed by this event, would be endless: we shall therefore wave all mention of them, and confine our attention to the two leading features contained in the history; and observe,

1. How blindly man acts in the discharge of his duty—

[If ever there was a man that possessed advantages for the knowledge of his duty, it was Saul of Tarsus. He was educated under Gamaliel, the most eminent teacher of his day, and made a proficiency in learning beyond most of his contemporaries; and he was eminently distinguished for those moral habits, which peculiarly qualify the mind for the reception of truth. Yet behold, this man conceived himself to be rendering acceptable service to his God, while persecuting his Church with the most unrelenting barbarity. Methinks, even reason itself should have taught him, that men ought not to be so treated, merely for entertaining novel sentiments, and for following the convictions of their minds. If indeed they were violating the public peace, and destroying the welfare of the state, the ringleaders of them might well be apprehended and tried: but to seize all whom he could lay his hands upon, and to drag women

as well as men to prison and to death, for no other crime than that of peaceably professing a new religion, was as contrary to humanity as to common sense.

Happy would it be if this erroneous mode of serving God had been confined to that age! but there are still many, who "have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge;" many, who can see the wicked going on in their wickedness, and never once stretch forth their hand to turn them back; but the moment they see persons embracing and obeying the Gospel of Christ, are filled with alarm, and think any methods proper to be used for stopping their progress. Our Lord himself told us beforehand, that it would be so, and that men would even "think they did God service in killing his devoted followers." Were these malignant dispositions found only among the ungodly and profane, we should not so much wonder at them: but they are found equally among the wise, the moral, and the conscientious. And this shews us, that when we see such persons opposing the Gospel, we ought to pity them, and to pray for them, and to give them credit for meaning well, even whilst they are fighting against God with all their might. And it may teach us at the same time, that *we* also are fallible, and that we may be deceiving our own souls, even whilst we are most confident that we are acting right. "There is a way, says Solomon, that seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death."]

2. How sovereignly God acts in the exercise of his grace—

[Madly as Saul was persecuting the Church, our blessed Saviour stopped him in his career, discovered to him his error, and made him a chosen vessel to propagate the faith which he had so laboured to destroy. Of those that were in company with him, not one, as far as we know, was made a partaker of the same mercy. They saw the light indeed, and heard the voice; but they understood not the things that were spoken[a], nor did they experience the same effects from the vision. And why was Saul so distinguished from the rest? What was there in that ferocious persecutor to *merit* such a favour? In vain shall we look for any other cause, but that which St. Paul himself assigns; "God separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace[b]:"—"By the grace of God I am what I am."

Now this doctrine is offensive to many: they claim a right to dispose of their own things as they will, and yet deny the same right to God. But his grace is his own, and he will dispense it to whomsoever he will; "nor will he give account

[a] Compare ver. 7. with xxii. 9. [b] Gal. i. 15.

to us of any of his matters:" "He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and will have compassion on whom he will have compassion." How strongly does St. Paul state this, in the Epistle to the Romans! "A potter hath power over the clay, to make, of the same lump, vessels of honour, and vessels unto dishonour:" and such is the right which God claims. If in the pride of our hearts we reply, 'Why then doth God find fault? for who hath resisted his will?' the Apostle thus indignantly reproves our presumption; "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" Let us acknowledge what in the case before us is perfectly undeniable, that God "saves us, and calls us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began:" and, if we will look for a reason, let this suffice us, "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight."]

Another view in which we should contemplate the conversion of St. Paul, is peculiarly important; namely,

II. As a model for our imitation—

Conversion is as necessary for us as ever it was for him; for though we are Christians already in name, we are not living members of Christ's mystical body, till we have been born again of the Spirit of God[c]. But here let it be distinctly noticed, that we must separate from St. Paul's conversion every thing that was miraculous, or that was peculiar to him: we are not to expect visions, or voices, or miraculous interpositions of any kind: but that which constituted the essential part of his conversion we must expect, and must experience too, if ever we would be numbered with the saints of God. We must have, like Paul,

1. An enlightened mind—

[For three days and nights he continued blind; and at the expiration of that time, "there fell, as it were, scales from his eyes[d]." This was doubtless intended as an emblematical representation to him of the blindness of his state by nature, and of the light into which he was now to be brought. Notwithstanding his great learning in the Scriptures, yet was he blind to the mysterious truths contained in them. Thus we

[c] Compare John iii. 3. with Rom. ii. 28, 29. [d] ver. 9, 18.

in like manner are blind to the spiritual import of the Scriptures, till God the Holy Spirit is pleased to "open the eyes of our understanding." "The natural man, whatever advantages he may enjoy, receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Not that a converted person must of necessity become acquainted with new truths; but he will know them in a perfectly different manner. He may have had the whole system of religion treasured up in his mind before; but now he contemplates the Gospel, as a shipwrecked mariner regards a vessel by which he has been rescued from a watery grave: he sees, that there is in it the exact provision which his necessities required, and a merciful pledge of his safe conveyance to the "desired haven."]

2. A convinced conscience—

[St. Paul before his conversion thought he was certainly in a state of acceptance with God: but when he began to view his past life in the glass of God's law, he saw himself a dead, and condemned sinner: "I was alive without the law once," says he; "but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." As to that zeal which he had exercised in persecuting the Church, he saw that it was impious in the highest degree; and, in reference to it, he called himself "a blasphemer, and injurious, and a persecutor," yea, even "the very chief of sinners." Thus must we also be humbled under a sense of our lost condition. What though we have not committed precisely the same sins as he, "we all have offended in many things," and are therefore deserving of God's everlasting wrath and indignation: and the very first effect of Divine illumination will be, to make us "smite on our breast, and cry, God be merciful to me a sinner!"]

3. A renewed will—

[Hitherto this furious bigot had been following his own will, and the will of the chief priests who sent him: but now he cries, "Lord, what wilt *Thou* have me to do?" Behold, how entirely he commits himself to the guidance of that Jesus, whom now he saw to be the Saviour of the world! He professes himself ready to comply with any direction that shall be given him; and determines henceforth to have no other rule of conduct than his Saviour's will. Here is the crown and summit of true conversion: we may have enlightened minds, and yet retain an unsanctified heart: we may have somewhat of a wounded spirit, and yet hold fast our iniquities: but if our will be changed, then it is certain that we have received the grace of God in truth. This therefore we must seek after:

we must say to our blessed Lord, "Other lords beside thee have had dominion over me, but henceforth I will regard none but thee:" 'I will search out thy will, as it is revealed unto men; I will take it in all things as a light unto my feet; and I will labour, through grace, to have even the thoughts of my heart brought into an unreserved obedience to it.']

Whilst we regard this work of divine grace as a model for our imitation, let us behold it,

III. As an example for our encouragement—

In this view it was particularly designed of God; as St. Paul himself informs us: "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first, Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for *a pattern to them* who *shall hereafter believe on him* to life everlasting[e]." Truly in the conversion of this bitter persecutor we see,

1. How far the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ can reach—

[We can scarcely conceive a state more desperate than that of Saul, when "breathing out threatenings and slaughter" against the saints of God: yet to him was mercy vouchsafed, and *that* too unsought, and unsolicited. Who then has any reason to despair? Who can say, My iniquities are too great to be forgiven? Let the weary and heavy-laden sinner, who is ready to say, "There is no hope," take courage, and lift up his soul to God in fervent prayer: for the blood of Christ is as effectual to cleanse from sin, as ever it was; and its virtue shall extend as far as ever, even to the very chief of sinners. "Where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound;" and "sins of a scarlet or a crimson dye" shall yet be washed away, so that the offender shall be made "white as snow."]

2. What great things the grace of Christ can effect—

[This man, who, previous to his conversion, was the bitterest enemy both of God and man, was transformed into a most distinguished friend of both. Of all the Apostles, not one excelled him in piety, or equalled him in laborious exertions for the cause of Christ. His besetting sins were all subdued, and his virtues were brought to the highest perfection. This change in him was, as it were, instantaneous; so that in him was fully and at once, verified that description of sound conversion, "Old things passed away, and all things became new."

[e] 1 Tim. i. 16.

Who then shall hereafter think himself enslaved beyond a possibility of redemption? Is not that grace which wrought effectually in Paul, sufficient for *us?* Can any thing be too hard for the Lord? Let not any then despond, under an idea that his corruptions are too deep and inveterate ever to be eradicated: for that same Jesus is yet possessed of all power in heaven and in earth, and is still "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him."]

APPLICATION—

[Let me, in conclusion, remind you all, that by nature you are "alienated from God," and "enemies to him in your minds by wicked works;" and more especially are you adverse to the humiliating doctrines of the Gospel. But Jesus now speaks to each of you by name, as he did to the Apostle Paul, "Why despisest thou me? Why turnest thou away from me?" On you he looks with the same compassion as he did on him, and warns you, that "it is in vain to kick against the pricks." The greater part of sinners, it is true, are unconscious that they are fighting against the Lord Jesus Christ: in many things they do, they really think themselves acting inoffensively, or perhaps agreeably to the will of God: but a neglect of the Gospel, no less than direct opposition to it, is an act of hostility to the Lord Jesus Christ, and must finally issue in our destruction. Listen then to his still small voice, and accept his gracious invitations: and if those around you are regardless of his call, let your minds at least be humbled, if peradventure you may be distinguished by him as chosen vessels of his mercy, and happy monuments of his grace.]

OUTLINE NO. 1763

SAUL'S PRAYER.

Acts ix. 11. *Behold, he prayeth.*

WHEN we speak of the grace of God as the free and only source of good to man, we are often misunderstood, as though we affirmed that man is wholly passive in the work of salvation: whereas, the truth is, that though, in the first instance, God puts into his heart the good desire, that desire immediately exerts itself in voluntary and earnest efforts for the attainment of the thing desired. This is discoverable in the conversion of Saul: in the first instance, God stopped him in his career of sin, and discovered to

him his guilt and danger; but from that moment Saul gave himself to fasting and prayer, that by those means he might obtain yet further blessings from God: and God, as though he would shew us in the most striking manner the necessity of our own personal exertions, expressly pointed out to Ananias the *reason* of his communicating further blessings to Saul through his instrumentality; "Go, and inquire for one called Saul of Tarsus; for, behold, he prayeth."

We will endeavour to point out,

I. What there was in that prayer which attracted the Divine notice—

We cannot doubt but that Saul, who was "touching the righteousness of the law blameless," had often bowed his knees before God in prayer: but he had never prayed aright till now. In this prayer of his was,

1. Humility—

[He never could have prayed with true humility before, because he was unconscious of his lost estate. He was ignorant of the spirituality of the law, and, consequently, of his multiplied transgressions against it: he even thought himself "alive," as having never given to God any just cause to condemn him. What then must his prayers have been, but, like those of the Pharisee, "I thank thee, O God, that I am not as other men are?" But contrition is the very essence of prayer: it is "the broken and contrite heart, which God will not despise." To "smite upon our breasts," as guilty self-condemning sinners, and to "cry for mercy," like the poor Publican, is more acceptable to God than all the sacrifices and burnt-offerings that ever were offered.]

2. Earnestness—

[It is a sense of need that must make us earnest: and, as Saul was insensible of his danger, he could not till now plead with that importunity that became him. But now he was like the manslayer fleeing from the avenger of blood. Now, like his Lord and Saviour, he "made prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears[a]:" and, like the patriarch Jacob, he wrestled with God, saying, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me[b]." Instantly therefore did God

[a] Heb. v. 7. [b] Hos. xii. 4.

fulfil to him that promise which Jesus has left us for the encouragement of all his people[c]—]

3. Faith—

[The prayers which Saul had offered in former times could not have had respect to a Saviour, because he had not felt his need of a Saviour. But now he saw that there was no hope of mercy, but through that very Jesus whom he had persecuted: now he thankfully embraced the salvation that Jesus offered him: he no longer "went about to establish a righteousness of his own, but gladly submitted to the righteousness of God" revealed in the Gospel. When he said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" he cordially received Christ as "his wisdom, his righteousness, his sanctification, and redemption:" and no sooner did he thus desire to make Christ his all, than God expressed his acceptance of his prayers, "Behold he prayeth!" God would not suffer the prayer of faith to go forth in vain.]

We propose, in the next place, to shew,

II. What we may learn from the notice which God took of it—

This fact is very instructive: it shews us,

1. That God is observant of our frame and conduct—

["The eye of God is in every place, beholding the evil and the good." But more especially does he look upon the humble suppliant: he himself declares, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word[d]." Behold, when a holy purpose was formed in the heart of Ephraim, how attentive God was to it; "Ephraim saith, What have I to do any more with idols?" Surely, saith God, "I have heard him, and observed him[e]." And when the same penitent laid his transgressions more deeply to heart, God quite exulted over him, if we may so speak: "Surely I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus"——— And then, with a complacent regard to him, God appealed, as it were, to the whole universe; "Is not Ephraim my dear son? is he not a pleasant child[f]?"———]

2. That mere formal services are not accounted prayer in God's sight—

[All the petitions which Saul had offered in former times were a mere lip-service which God did not accept. "God is a

[c] Matt. vii. 7, 8. [d] Isai. lxvi. 2. [e] Hos. xiv. 8.
[f] Jer. xxxi. 18—20.

Spirit; and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth:" the heart must accompany the lips, or else the worship is hypocritical and vain[g]. This is strongly marked by the Prophet Jeremiah, who tells us that *then*, and then *only*, shall God be found, when we seek for him with our whole heart[h].]

3. That humble and believing prayer shall never go forth in vain—

[God may see fit to suspend his answer for a time: even in the case before us, he did not answer till Saul had continued in prayer three whole days and nights. But "though he tarry, he will come at last:" he has assured us, in the parable of the Importunate Widow, that the prayer of faith shall never be in vain[i]: and in very many instances he fulfils to men that promise which he has given us by the Prophet Isaiah, "It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear[k]."]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who never pray at all—

[Alas! how many are there of whom the All-seeing God must say, 'Behold he rises from his bed without prayer: he goes through the day, and retires to rest again, without prayer: this is his constant habit: the sins he commits, excite in him no compunction: and the mercies he receives, call forth no gratitude: he lives without God in the world: ungrateful wretch that he is, he never calls upon my name: never once in all his life could I truly say of him, "Behold, he prayeth."' Brethren, do you know that all this neglect is recorded in the book of God's remembrance, and that it must be accounted for at last? Do not deceive yourselves with an idea that your formal heartless services are accepted of him; for, if he that wavereth in his mind through unbelieving fears shall receive nothing of the Lord, much less shall *he* receive any thing who never asks with any real desire to obtain the blessings he asks for[l].]

2. To those who do pray—

[It is a great mercy if our minds have been so far awakened to a sense of our guilt and danger, that we have been constrained to cry to God for deliverance. But we are ever prone to relapse into coldness and formality: indeed there is nothing more difficult than to keep up a spirit of prayer, and to live nigh to God, in a state of habitual fellowship with him.

[g] Matt. xv. 8, 9. [h] Jer. xxix. 13, 14. [i] Luke xviii. 7.
[k] Isai. lxv. 24. [l] Jam. i. 6, 7.

Any little thing, however trifling and insignificant, is sufficient to divert our attention from prayer, or to distract our minds in the performance of it. Hence we are so often exhorted to pray without ceasing, to watch unto prayer, to continue instant in it with all perseverance. Let us then guard against fainting or weariness in this holy duty. It will be of no benefit to us to have sought after God in former times, if we decline from him now: our former prayers will be of no service, if they be discontinued. As our former sinfulness shall not be remembered, when once we turn unto God in penitence and faith; so neither shall our past righteousness be remembered, if we depart from it.

It is possible that we may be hindered in this duty, by an apprehension that we shall not be heard: but we must guard against this temptation, by recollecting, that there is no guilt so great but the prayer of faith can remove it[m], nor any state so desperate from which it shall not prevail to deliver us[n]. "God never did, nor ever will say to any, 'Seek ye my face' in vain."]

[m] See the peculiar stress laid on prayer in reference to Manasseh; 2 Chron xxxiii. 12, 13, 18, 19.

[n] Jonah ii. 1—4.

OUTLINE NO. 1764

DORCAS RESTORED TO LIFE.

Acts ix. 39, 40. *Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.*

HOWEVER careful the ministers of Christ may be in stating the great doctrine of salvation by faith, their adversaries will represent them as enemies to good works. The denying to good works the office of justifying men before God, is thought to destroy every inducement to perform them. But if we look at the conduct of the first Christians, we shall see in that an ample refutation of this error. Dorcas, for instance, was "a Disciple," looking for salvation through the merits of a crucified Redeemer: but was

she therefore regardless of good works? Did she not rather abound in them? and was not this the foundation of that high esteem in which she has been held by the Church of God in all ages? That we may be stirred up to follow her example, let us consider the account here given of her:

I. Her character—

What was her condition in life we do not exactly know; but we suppose that she was in a middle state, between poverty and riches: but of the use that she made of her time and property, we are fully informed: she employed herself much in administering to the necessities of the poor, and particularly in making garments for them. In a word, her character was,

1. Most lovely in itself—

[The doing of good in any way is amiable; but her mode of doing it was peculiarly so; inasmuch as it argued a habit of consideration, compassion, diligence, and self-denial. The bestowing of money is a small act of love in comparison of hers: for though money will procure necessaries for the poor, yet her mode of disposing of it made it go farther, if we may so speak, than if it had been expended by the poor themselves; and at the same time, it kept alive in her heart a constant principle of love. By this practice of hers the poor were continually, as it were, before her eyes; she thought for them, acted for them, worked for them, and sought her own happiness in contributing to theirs. As her Lord and Master "went about doing good," so she made it her daily business and occupation to diffuse blessings all around her: she not only "*did* good works," but was *full* of them, and made the exercises of benevolence her habitual *practice*[a].]

2. Most acceptable to God—

[Doubtless, if her actions had proceeded from an ostentatious or self-righteous principle, they could not have been pleasing to God; for "without faith it is impossible to please him:" but if they were the fruits of faith in Christ, they were most truly acceptable unto God. See how strongly this is declared in different parts of Holy Writ[b] — — — In speaking on this subject, many religious persons feel a very undue degree of jealousy: they are afraid of declaring all that God

[a] This is the real force of the words ὧν ἐποίει, ver. 36. Compare 1 John iii. 9. in the Greek.

[b] Heb. xiii. 16. Phil. iv. 18.

says respecting the value of such works in his sight, lest they should appear to countenance a self-righteous spirit: but, if only we carefully exclude the idea of their being *meritorious*, or availing any thing for our justification before God, it is scarcely possible to state too strongly the delight which God takes in them, or the certainty of their being most richly recompensed in the eternal world[c]: every one of them is a loan "lent to the Lord[d];" and he would consider himself unjust, if he should forget so much as one of them in the great day of final retribution[e]: not even a cup of cold water given for his sake, shall pass unnoticed, or lose its reward[f].]

Her piety however did not exempt her from the common lot of mortality. We are next called to contemplate,

II. Her death—

Like others, "she fell sick and died." But though disease and death were permitted to cut her off even as the wicked, and thereby to shew that "all things come alike to all," yet there was an immense difference between her and others in the regret experienced for the loss of her—

[A tear or two is all the tribute that is paid to the greater part of mankind, except by those who are their near relatives, or immediate dependents. But at the loss of her, all the Church at Joppa mourned; and the greatest solicitude was expressed to have her restored to them from the dead. They had heard of Peter healing by a word a man who had been confined to his bed for eight years[g]; they deputed therefore two persons to wait upon him, (for he was only about six miles off,) to request his interposition with God in their behalf: and, when he came, they expressed their grief in the most affecting manner; shewed him at the same time the fruits of her industry and benevolence, that so they might interest his feelings, and engage his prayers for her restoration to life.

What a blessed testimony was this! how much better than the fulsome eulogies of panegyrists, or the funeral pomp of kings! yes, the tears of the godly, and the lamentations of the poor, are the noblest monuments that departed worth can have. O that we may all so live, as to be thus regretted by the Lord's people, and to have our memory engraven in the hearts of all who knew us! And let us take care that the survivors may have substantial proofs of our piety to exhibit. We are not all able to do good in the same way, or to the same extent: but

[c] 1 Tim. vi. 17—19. [d] Prov. xix. 17. [e] Heb. vi. 10.
[f] Matt. x. 42. [g] ver. 33, 34.

we may all have some "works to praise us in the gates[h]," and some fruits "to evince the sincerity of our faith" and love.]

The success of their application to Peter leads us to notice,

III. Her restoration to life—

Peter having been introduced into the chamber where the corpse lay, desired all to depart, that he might not be interrupted in his supplications to the Deity: and, when he had obtained his request, he presented her alive again to her friends.

What an unspeakable benefit was this to the world!

[Whilst her own immediate friends had the comfort of her society, and the poor enjoyed the benefit of her pious labours, the whole Church of God were edified with her bright example. It is astonishing what one person may do, by the mere influence of his own example; how many he may stimulate, how many he may encourage. We may well suppose, that, where her conduct was so highly admired, she was the means of promoting many acts of benevolence in others, who without such an example would either never have exerted themselves at all, or never to so great an extent. Even to the ungodly world her restoration to life was an unspeakable blessing; since many, by means of it, were stirred up to inquire into the truth of Christianity, and to believe in that Jesus whom they had before despised[i].]

Nor was it any other than a blessing to herself—

[We cannot suppose that there was left in her mind any remembrance of her felicity in her disembodied state, at least any such remembrance as should cause regret: we take for granted that she was restored to all her former habits of mind, with the same disposition to enjoy the society of her friends, and to abound in every good work. What a comfort then must it be to her to behold those who had so bitterly bewailed her loss! With what redoubled energy would she betake herself to her former labours of love; knowing now, from experience, how short her time might be either for the benefiting of the poor or the glorifying of her God! And these renewed labours would of necessity be recorded, like all her former works, and would follow her when she should rest from them, and augment her weight of glory to all eternity. Surely all this must be considered as a blessing to her soul. As Paul, though desirous to die and be with Christ, was yet content to live that

[h] Prov. xxxi. 31. [i] ver. 42.

he might serve and honour God in the work of the ministry; so might she be well content to live on earth again, seeing that her opportunities of benefiting the poor, and honouring God, and advancing her own eternal welfare, would be thus prolonged.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are living for themselves—

[This is the state of mankind at large; "all men seek their own, and not the things of Jesus Christ[k]" — — — But this is highly criminal: our time, our talents, our very bodies and souls, are the Lord's, and must be altogether employed for his glory[l] — — — All profession of religion unaccompanied with activity in good works, is vain[m]. The very intent of the Gospel is to make us diligent in the performance of them[n]; nor can we ever answer the design of our Lord's sufferings, if we do not live, not unto ourselves, but unto Him that died for us and rose again[o]."]

2. Those who profess to be living unto God—

[Study, like Dorcas, how you can be most useful to the poor: consider their wants, and how you may most effectually relieve them. In "bearing the burthens of others, you fulfil the law of Christ;" and, in truth, you best consult your own happiness. Who that reads the character of Job[p], must not envy his happiness, as well as admire his piety? Verily there is a delight in acts of benevolence, which cannot be procured by any other means. Let all then who profess religion, shew forth their faith by their works. The poor may do their part, as well as the rich[q]; and shall "be accepted" according to their respective abilities[r].]

k Phil. ii. 21.
l 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.
m Jam. ii. 13—17. Matt. vii. 21.
n Tit. iii. 8, 9, 14.
o 2 Cor. v. 15. and Rom. xiv. 7—9.
p Job xxix. 11—13.
q Eph. iv. 28.
r 2 Cor. viii. 12.

OUTLINE NO. 1765

HOW TO ATTEND ORDINANCES.

Acts x. 33. *Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.*

HERE we see the door of salvation opened to the Gentiles: and it is a sight in which we are deeply interested; for it is in virtue of the commission then given, and then executed, that you are assembled and

addressed on this day. And O what a blessing it would be, if you all possessed the frame of mind then manifested by Cornelius and his company! Surely we might hope, in that case, that there should be somewhat of a similar blessing upon us, to the edification and salvation of all our souls.

Let us particularly notice,

I. What they expected Peter to declare unto them—

Cornelius had had a special intimation that Peter was ordained of God to be his instructor in the way of life[a]: him, therefore, he regarded as God's Ambassador to his soul[b]: and from him he hoped to hear, without any reserve, all that God had commissioned him to declare. Now,

This is the light in which every minister of Christ should be viewed—

[Though we are not Apostles, yet are we ambassadors of God to the people of our charge, and have the same message to deliver now as the Apostles had in their day[c]. We are to "preach peace by Jesus Christ[d]" — — — We are to declare the sufficiency of Christ to "save all that come unto God by him[e]" — — — And this salvation we are to proclaim indiscriminately to all, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free[f].]

And you have a right to expect the utmost fidelity at our hands—

[We are to "keep back nothing that is profitable unto you," but to "declare unto you the whole counsel of God." The express command of God to us is, "He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully[g]." We are to do this, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear. God says to us, as he did to the Prophet Ezekiel: "Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall shew thee: for to the intent that I might shew them unto thee art thou brought hither: declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel[h]." And, as it is our duty, so it is also our privilege, confidently to affirm, that "what our eyes have seen, our ears have heard, and our hands have handled, of the word of life, that same declare we unto you[i]."]

[a] ver. 5, 6, 32. [b] ver. 25. [c] 2 Cor. v. 18—20.
[d] ver. 36. [e] ver. 43. with Heb. vii. 25. [f] ver. 34, 35.
[g] Jer. xxiii. 28. [h] Ezek. xl. 4. [i] 1 John i. 1—3.

But it is of peculiar importance that we should observe,

II. In what frame of mind they were prepared to receive it—

We see in that assembly of heathens,

1. A reverential sense of the Divine presence—

[" Now," said Cornelius, " are we all here present before God." And should it not be so with us, whenever we come up to the house of God? As for that irreverent spirit which many betray in the house of God, yes, and which many manifest also when crowding to hear some popular preacher, we cannot but greatly disapprove of it, and bear our decided testimony against it. We should rather resemble the Israelites, when convened to hear Jehovah himself addressing them from Mount Sinai. Surely " God is greatly to be feared, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him." And then only are we likely to profit from what we hear, when we conceive of God himself as speaking to us; and can adopt the words of Samuel, " Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."]

2. A readiness to receive the word without gainsaying—

[We cannot conceive of one single person in that assembly as disposed to sit in judgment upon Peter's word. They would all receive it with the utmost readiness of mind. And it is in that way that the Gospel should be heard by all. We should " receive it with meekness, as an engrafted word[k]." We see how submissive, so to speak, the tree is to him that engrafts upon it a scion of any kind: so, with entire submission, should we suffer the word of truth to be engrafted on our hearts, in order to its most perfect union with us, and its future production of the desired fruit. St. Paul's representation of this matter is peculiarly instructive. He represents the Gospel as a mould into which we are to be poured, in order that we may receive its entire character upon our souls[l]. That shews the tenderness of spirit with which we should hear the word, and the completeness of our subjection to it when so received.]

3. A determination of heart to obey it without reserve—

[That happy company embraced the word, just as the Beræans after them embraced it[m]. They disputed not about the way of salvation as incredible or insufficient, but believed

[k] Jam. i. 21. [l] Rom. vi. 17. [m] Acts xvii. 11, 12.

in Jesus as the true Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Nor should any thing in the Gospel prove a stumbling-block to us. Nothing should be regarded as "a hard saying." However mysterious the declarations of the Gospel may be, we should implicitly embrace it as "the wisdom of God:" and, however self-denying his precepts may be, we should obey them cheerfully, as "holy and just and good." "As new-born babes, we should desire the word" as the proper nutriment of our souls; and we should desire it, "that we may live and grow thereby[n]." Perhaps the most perfect pattern in the Scriptures is the blind man whom Jesus had restored to sight. After he had been excommunicated by the rulers of his Church, the Lord Jesus sought him out, and asked him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" To which he replied, "Who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him[o]?" Now here was no information sought, but in order to its practical effect. And thus should we also be ready, not only to receive the word, but to take it as the entire rule both of our faith and practice.]

APPLICATION—

[Let me now suppose you, my brethren, assembled in the very spirit of Cornelius and his friends. I have the very same message to deliver to you, as Peter delivered to them; "I preach to you peace by Jesus Christ"———You need this instruction as much as ever Cornelius did; for there is no other by which you, or any man living, can be saved[p]. And for you it shall be as effectual as it was for him[q]———O that you may all receive it as he did! Let there not be amongst you any of that character from whom St. Paul was constrained to turn in utter despondency[r]——— But hear and believe, to the saving of your souls.]

[n] 1 Pet. ii. 2. [o] John ix. 35, 36. [p] Acts xi. 14.
[q] ver. 44. [r] Acts xxviii. 27.

OUTLINE NO. 1766

SALVATION OFFERED EQUALLY TO ALL.

Acts x. 34, 35. *Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*

GOD's purpose of love towards the Gentile world had been made known even from the time that God

separated Abraham and his posterity as a peculiar people unto himself. The call of Abraham in an uncircumcised state, and the justifying of him by faith whilst he yet continued uncircumcised, was in itself a sign that God would not ultimately limit his mercies to those of the circumcision: and his declaration, that in Abraham and his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed, was a pledge that in due time all the nations of the earth, Gentiles as well as Jews, should be blessed in Christ. Our Lord had repeatedly informed his Disciples, that "he had other sheep, which were not of the Jewish fold;" and, that "many should come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and sit down with the Patriarchs in the kingdom of heaven;" whilst the Jews, the natural "children of that kingdom, should be cast out." He had given the express command, that "his Gospel should be preached to every creature;" and he had actually "given to Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven," that he might open the gates thereof both to Jews and Gentiles. In obedience to this commission, Peter had opened the kingdom to the Jews on the day of Pentecost; but so entirely was he under the power of Jewish prejudice, that, for six years, both he, and all the other Apostles, had forborne to preach unto the Gentiles: nor, till he was overcome by the force of evidence which he could no longer doubt, would he believe that the Gentiles were to be admitted to the privileges of the Gospel. His doubts however being at last removed, he, with a mixture of surprise and joy, acknowledged his former error, and proclaimed the blessed truth which we have just read to you.

We propose to state,

I. The import of his words—

Plain as the words of our text appear, they have been very differently interpreted by different persons; some supposing them to be decisive upon points, wherewith, in the eyes of others, they have no immediate connexion. We will endeavour therefore to shew,

1. What they do not mean—

[*They do not*, as many imagine, *restrict the Supreme Being in the exercise of his grace.* God's grace is his own; and he dispenses it according to his own sovereign will and pleasure. That he has done so in former times, it is impossible to deny. Was not Abraham an idolater in the land of Ur? yet "God called him *alone*, and blessed him[a]." In blessing the seed of Abraham, did God take Ishmael, who was born according to nature? No; but gave Abraham a son in a præternatural way, even Isaac: and limited the blessing to *his* line. In the seed of Isaac, God exercised the same sovereign grace; choosing, even whilst they were yet in the womb together, the younger son, Jacob, in preference to Esau, the elder; saying, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated[b]." Now, whether we suppose these persons chosen to everlasting salvation or not, it is evident that they were chosen to enjoy *the means* of salvation; and consequently either God is "a respecter of persons," or 'the respecting of persons' must mean something very different from the sovereign distribution of God's favours unto men. We all know that God did vouchsafe peculiar mercies to the Jews above the Heathens; as he still does to the Christian world. If this was not wrong formerly, it is not so now: but Christ himself made this free exercise of God's grace and mercy, a ground of praise and thanksgiving; and therefore we also may adore God for it, and say, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight[c]."

Neither do these words establish the doctrine of salvation by works. If there be any thing plain in God's word, it is, that God has given us a Saviour, through whose obedience unto death we are to be saved. As the whole Jewish ritual shadowed forth our acceptance through the Great Sacrifice, so the epistles to the Romans and the Galatians were written on purpose to establish this great truth, that we are to be saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and not by any works of our own. Indeed, if salvation were by works, even in any degree, Christ would so far have died in vain. Moreover, salvation could no more be of grace; because works and grace are opposite to each other; the one implying, that salvation is paid us as a debt; and the other, that it is freely and gratuitously bestowed upon us. Now this being the uniform declaration of God throughout the whole Scripture, it is manifest, that this single expression must not be so understood, as to set aside the universal testimony of the written word.

[a] Isai. li. 1, 2. [b] Rom. ix. 7—13. [c] Matt. xi. 25, 26.

We will now proceed to state,]

2. What they do mean—

[The Jews imagined themselves to be the only people whom God would ever admit to his favour. As for the Gentile world, the Jews regarded them as dogs, and as accursed of the Lord. Some of them went so far as to think, that no Jew, however wicked, would be condemned, nor any Gentile, however righteous, would be saved. Against this kind of error both the Baptist and our Lord bore testimony[d]. And even the Apostles themselves were far from having a correct judgment respecting it: they supposed that God would favour the Jews, because they were Jews; and that he would not look upon the Gentiles, because they were Gentiles. But God had now shewn to Peter, that this was an error: he had shewn to him, that the partition-wall between Jews and Gentiles was broken down; that no man was henceforth to be accounted unclean; that his Gospel was to be freely preached to all without any distinction; and that all, of whatever nation they might be, should be accepted with him, provided they really feared him, and wrought righteousness; that is, that God would not regard any thing in man, but his moral and religious character: if any man possessed ever so many privileges, they should avail nothing to his eternal welfare, unless they were accompanied with such dispositions and actions as characterized the elect of God: but, if any man sought him humbly, and served him faithfully, he should be brought to the knowledge of salvation, and his feet be guided into the way of peace.

That this is the real meaning of the passage, appears from the whole context. Peter no sooner came to Cornelius, than he reminded him of the barrier which had been placed between Jews and Gentiles, so as to cut off all friendly intercourse between them; and told him how that barrier had been removed: and, when he found the account which the messengers had given him, confirmed by Cornelius himself, and that God had interposed as much to direct Cornelius to send for Peter, as to direct Peter to go to him, "he opened his mouth" with a solemnity suited to the occasion, and proclaimed God as the common Father of all mankind, equally accessible to all, and equally gracious unto all, who should seek and serve him in his appointed way[e].]

The words thus explained are very instructive. Let us consider,

II. The truths to be deduced from them—

They SHEW us,

[d] Matt. iii. 9, 10. John viii. 39, 44. [e] Rom. x. 11, 12.

1. That we have nothing to hope from any worldly distinctions—

[The Jewish notion of God's regarding men on account of outward distinctions is generally prevalent amongst ourselves. Many fancy, that because we have been baptized we must of necessity be in a state of favour with God; and many who will not altogether avow that principle, yet imagine that God will not proceed with the same severity against the great and learned, as he will against the poor and ignorant. Hence, though we may be permitted to warn the poor of their guilt and danger, we must not presume to take such a liberty with the rich: we are not to suppose that any of them can perish, or that God requires from them the same homage and service as he does from the lower classes of mankind. But to this point the text is plain and express: "God is no respecter of persons:" his law is equally obligatory on all; and his decisions in the day of judgment will be impartial, every one being adjudged to happiness or misery according to his works[f]. In the book of Revelation is a passage well deserving the notice of those who think that any regard will be shewn to learning or wealth or honour in that day[g] — — — At the same time, the poor will find it equally instructive to them: for they are ready to suppose that their present trials and difficulties will procure them the same kind of favour in that day, as the rich are looking for on account of their fancied greatness. But the poor, even the poorest bond-slaves, will there be found, associates in misery with their proud oppressors, and equally "calling upon the rocks and mountains to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb." The only difference between one and another will be this: they who were the foremost in religious privileges, will be most signally visited with the Divine judgments: in that only will the Jew be distinguished from the Gentile, or the rich from the poor[h]; "To whom much has been given, of them will the more be required:" but there will be the same ground of judgment for all[i]: the image of Christ upon the soul will be the only thing that will be regarded, either as the evidence of our conversion, or as the measure of our recompence[k].]

2. That we have nothing to fear from any secret decrees—

[That "God *chooses* men to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth," is asserted by God

[f] See Job xxxiv. 19.

[g] Rev. vi. 15—17. Observe how many words are used to characterize the rich! Does not that speak loudly to them?

[h] Rom. ii. 9—11. [i] 1 Pet. i. 17.

[k] This is the true meaning of Col. iii. 11.

himself: but that he *reprobates* any, and from all eternity decreed to consign them over to perdition without any offence or fault of theirs, we cannot admit: we think that *oath* of God's, that "he has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live," is decisive on the point; and all the reasonings of fallible men are lighter than vanity, in opposition to it. But, not to enter into dispute about these things, one thing is clear, that of whatever sect, or party, or nation we may be, if we "fear God and work righteousness, we shall be accepted." What then have we to do with the Divine decrees? What reason has any man to say, 'It is in vain for me to seek after God; because God has not elected me?' Who ever ascended to heaven, to see whether his name were, or were not, written in the book of life? "Secret things must be left to *God*, to whom alone they properly belong: the things that are revealed belong to *us*:" and this declaration in our text is plain, and clear, and absolute. Let every one therefore put away all distressing apprehensions about the decrees of God, and seek to attain that character which shall infallibly lead to happiness and glory ———]

3. That if we improve diligently the light we have, God will give us more light—

[God forbid that we should for a moment entertain the thought, that we, by any diligence of ours, can *merit* any thing at the hands of God, or lay him under an obligation to confer upon us the blessings of salvation. We have no claim upon him, except that which his own free and gracious promises have given us: but if, in dependence on those promises, we press forward in his appointed way, then may we expect assuredly that those promises shall be fulfilled to us. Now God has promised, that "then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord; &c.[l]" We may be confident therefore that we shall not use the means in vain. Whether Cornelius would have been saved if this fresh revelation had not been made to him, we will not take upon ourselves absolutely to determine; though Peter, and the rest of the Apostles appear to have considered his salvation as altogether effected by his conversion to Christianity[m]. But throughout the whole history, frequent notice is taken of the prayers and alms of Cornelius, as approved of God, and as being the *means* of bringing down yet greater blessings upon him: they are represented as being accepted before God, precisely as the meat-offerings were accepted from the Jews: as *a memorial* of the latter, when burnt upon the altar, was an offering of a

[l] Hos. vi. 3. Quote and explain the whole verse.
[m] Acts xi. 14, 18.

sweet savour unto the Lord[n], so "the prayers and alms of Cornelius came up for *a memorial* before God[o]." Such a memorial shall our prayers and alms-deeds be, if offered unto God with real humility of mind, and with an earnest desire to obtain a fuller knowledge of his will. Though therefore I would not exhort any one to *rest* in a low state of knowledge and of grace, I would encourage the weakest person, if sincere, to expect from God still richer communications of his grace, together with the ultimate possession of his glory. God will "fulfil the *desire* of them that *fear* him, and of them that *hope* in his mercy." Only let us listen to the word of God with the same disposition as Cornelius and his family did[p], and God will rather work miracles to save us, than suffer us to "perish for lack of knowledge." I mean not that God will really work *miracles* for any one; but that he will either, by his providence, bring us an instructor for the further illumination of our minds; or that, by his Spirit, he will guide us into all truth through the instrumentality of the written word: "He never said to any, 'Seek ye my face' in vain."]

[n] Lev. ii. 1, 2, 9. [o] ver. 4. [p] ver. 33.

OUTLINE NO. 1767

CHRIST'S DILIGENCE IN BENEFITING MAN.

Acts x. 38. *Who went about doing good.*

THERE are many principles in the human heart, that are capable of calling forth all the energy of our minds, and all the exertion of our bodies: but it is to be lamented that these principles, being evil in their nature, are, for the most part, destructive in their tendency. Ambition and the love of filthy lucre have operated in every age to the production of efforts that have excited the wonder and admiration of the world. But rarely has such zeal been found on the side of virtue. One however has appeared on earth whose only object was to do good; and whose labours were never equalled by mortal man. He was steady and uniform in his course, like the sun in its orbit; and, like that bright luminary, diffused the richest blessings wherever he came. This man was Jesus of Nazareth; of whom the Apostle justly says in our text, "He went about doing good."

We shall,

I. Confirm this record from the history of Jesus—

That we may contract our subject within proper limits, we will confine our attention to three things that are peculiarly worthy of notice:

1. His condescension—

[The great and mighty of the earth, however disposed to benefit mankind, are almost inaccessible to the poor; who must come often, and wait long, and get richer persons for their advocates, and, after all, be dismissed without having obtained the full object of their wishes. But Jesus gave liberty to all to come unto him: their poverty did not excite his contempt; nor the loathsomeness of their disorders his disgust. He suffered them to throng him on every side, and to touch him. Not even their moral depravity caused him to stand aloof from them. On the contrary, he sought out the poorest, the most miserable, and the most depraved; as though he had determined to honour those most, whom the rest of the world most disregarded and despised. Hence it was cast in his teeth, that he was "a friend of publicans and sinners."]

2. His diligence—

[From the time that our Lord entered on his ministry to the very hour of his crucifixion, there was not a single day wherein he was not actively engaged in doing good both to the bodies and the souls of men. "It was his very meat and drink to do the will of God" in this respect. He *staid not at home* that persons might come to him; but he himself *went about*, he "went about" through all cities, towns, and villages, in order to administer instruction and comfort to "those who lay in darkness and the shadow of death." Sometimes when he had spent the whole night in prayer he would return to his labours, without regarding the calls of nature for rest and refreshment; insomuch that his friends were ready to blame him as transported with zeal beyond all the bounds of reason and propriety[a].

The scope of every thing that he either said or did, was to benefit mankind. Whether his discourses savoured of affection or severity, and whether his miracles were more or less benevolent in their immediate aspect, his design was invariably the same; namely, to prepare men for the reception of his truth, and the enjoyment of his salvation[b].]

[a] Mark iii. 21. Ὅτι ἐξέστη, see Doddridge in loc.

[b] His menaces in Matt. xxiii. were to reclaim the Pharisees: and his suffering the devils to destroy the swine, was to shew how great a mercy it was to be delivered from their power.

3. His self-denial—

[It was no small self-denial that he exercised in undergoing so many labours, and submitting to so many privations, even of food to eat, and of "a place where to lay his head." But there was another species of self-denial, far more painful in its nature, and distressing in its operation, which yet he had to endure every day and hour. In the midst of all his exertions for the good of men, his words were made a ground of cavil and dispute; his condescension was interpreted as a participation in the vilest crimes; and his very miracles were construed into a confederacy with the devil. This was the way in which his benevolence was constantly requited. His unwearied labours for the honour of God, and the benefit of mankind, procured him only the reputation of an impostor, a blasphemer, a demoniac. Yet under all these circumstances, and well knowing that, instead of being improved by time, they would terminate in his death, he persevered in seeking the salvation of his very enemies, and at last "gave his own life a ransom for them."]

It being needless to confirm this record by any further testimonies, we shall,

II. Deduce from it some important observations—

Here also we must be content to NOTICE only two or three things out of multitudes that obtrude themselves upon our minds:

1. The Divine mission of Jesus is clear and indisputable—

[Our blessed Lord frequently appealed to his works as the clearest evidence of his Messiahship[c]: and indeed they were so in a variety of views. They were precisely such as had been predicted by the prophets as characteristic of the Messiah's reign; and therefore they must be considered as establishing his claim to that office. Besides, they were such as no man could work unless God were with him. Now can we conceive it possible that God should conspire with an impostor to deceive mankind? That he might in some particular instances permit something præternatural to be wrought for the hardening of an obstinate and incorrigible opposer, is possible enough[d]: but the nature and number of Christ's miracles, together with the scope and tendency of all his discourses, shews that this idea

[c] John x. 38.

[d] This was the fact with regard to Pharaoh's magicians. They could bring *some* plagues, but not *all*: nor could they remove *any*: so careful was God to shew that "whereinsoever his enemies dealt proudly he was above them."

is wholly inadmissible in the case before us. Nor indeed can it be imagined, that a person whose character and conduct resembled that of Christ, should, without any other prospect than that of infamy in life, and misery in death, carry on an imposture for the sole purpose of deceiving and ruining mankind.

Let us then behold the life of Jesus, and doubt his Messiahship if we can.]

2. Jesus is at this instant both able and willing to "do good" to *us*—

[When Jesus left this world, he did not cease to possess almighty power: on the contrary, he began to exercise it in the most unlimited extent. He still continued to work miracles through the instrumentality of his Apostles. Was Eneas healed? "Eneas," says the Apostle, "Jesus Christ maketh thee whole[e]." Jesus Christ himself, many years after his ascension, told his beloved Disciple, that he had "the keys of hell and of death," or, in other words, the power over both the visible and invisible world. Yea, he comes amongst us as truly by the preaching of his Gospel, as ever he did among the Jews by his bodily presence: he comes to seek out the most miserable and unworthy objects, that on them he may bestow all the blessings of grace and glory. All of us may have access to him, and pour our complaints into his bosom, and obtain from him the mercies we stand in need of. If only we can by faith touch, as it were, the hem of his garment, our most inveterate corruptions shall be healed. Let us but be thoroughly persuaded of this truth, and "virtue shall come forth from him to heal us all."]

3. Every true Christian will resemble Christ in doing good—

[Though some things which our Lord both said and did are not proper for our imitation, because they were peculiar to his office, yet many things were done by him on purpose that they might be imitated[f]; and, in respect of the general tenour of his conduct, it is our bounden duty to follow him[g]. A delight in doing good must above all things evidence itself in all his people. We might as well think ourselves his Disciples while committing the grossest crimes, as while living in an habitual want of benevolent affections. Our Lord himself has warned us, that the issue of the final judgment will depend on this very point. If for his sake, we have abounded in every good word and work, we shall be received by him with plaudits;

[e] Acts ix. 34. [f] John xiii. 14, 15. [g] 1 John ii. 6.

but if not, we shall be banished from him with tokens of his heaviest displeasure[h].

Let all of us then approve ourselves his true Disciples by our resemblance to him in condescension, diligence, and self-denial. By nothing will he be so much glorified, or our sincerity evinced, as by this. O that we might all be henceforth known by this character, *They go about doing good!*]

4. The institution before us is worthy of most liberal support[i]."

[h] Matt. xxv. 34—46.

[i] Whatever the occasion be, whether for a *Benevolent Society*, or a *Spital Sermon*, or any other, it should be here stated, and, in a way of comparison or contrast, be recommended.

OUTLINE NO. 1768

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LEADING DOCTRINES OF THE GOSPEL.

Acts x. 43. *To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.*

FOR the space of two thousand years the knowledge of the true God was confined to one nation. But from the beginning it was God's intention in due time to reveal himself to the Gentiles also, and to incorporate them with the Jewish Church. This was frequently declared by the prophets[a], and insisted on by our Lord[b]: yet such was the force of prejudice, that the Apostles themselves, notwithstanding the instructions they had received from their Divine Master, and the express commission given them to preach the Gospel to every creature[c], could not conceive that the partition wall was to be broken down. For six years after the day of Pentecost they continued to preach to Jews only; and, when they heard that Peter had gone to speak to a Gentile, they were filled with indignation, and called him to an account for what they deemed a most unwarrantable proceeding[d].

[a] See Rom. ix. 25—27. and x. 18—20.

[b] Matt. viii. 11, 12. and John x. 16.

[c] Matt. xxviii. 19. and Mark xvi. 16.

[d] Matt. xvi. 19.

It had been foretold to Peter, that he should have the keys of the kingdom of heaven[e], or of the Gospel dispensation. He had already opened the door to the Jews on the day of Pentecost[f]: and now he was sent of God to open it to the Gentiles. The manner in which his doubts were removed will be noticed in another place: at present we observe, that his high commission was executed in the ever-memorable words which we have just read: in elucidating which, we shall consider,

I. The doctrines contained in them—

The Apostle's address to his Gentile audience was concise; but it was clear and energetic. The two leading points in which all men need to be informed were laid down with precision, namely, that salvation is,

1. Through Christ as the author—

[To see the force and propriety of the Apostle's words, we must consider the occasion of them, and the character of the person to whom they were addressed.

The person who had sent for him was "Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian band[g]." He was a Gentile, but had renounced idolatry, and was a worshipper of the true God. He was singularly pious and "devout:" he was extremely liberal even to the very "people" who held him in abhorrence: and he was careful to bring up his family also in the fear of God. This man, on a day that he had set apart for solemn fasting and prayer[h], was visited by an angel, who directed him to send for Peter to shew him the way of salvation[i].

Now it was to *this man* that Peter spake, when he said, that remission of sins was to be obtained "through the name of Christ." We must therefore understand him as saying, that, however Cornelius might be a worshipper of Jehovah, and not of idols; however sincerely he might fear God, however eminent he might be in respect of abstinence and devotion, of liberality and attention to the spiritual welfare of his family, salvation was not to be obtained by any of these things *under the Gospel dispensation*, but was to be sought through the name and merits of Jesus Christ. Christ was sent to make atonement for our sins, and to reconcile us unto God; and

[e] Acts xi. 2, 3. [f] Acts ii. 14, 38, 41. [g] Acts x. 1, 2.

[h] Acts x. 30. It is not improbable that he was engaged in prayer *with his family* at the very time God sent the angel to him. Compare τῷ οἴκῳ in ver. 2. and ver. 30.

[i] Acts x. 32.

through him *only*, through him *exclusively*, we must find acceptance with God.]

2. By faith as the means—

[Here again our best illustration of the subject will be from the context. Had Peter simply told Cornelius that he must seek remission of sins through the name of Christ, Cornelius might have thought, that he was to recommend himself to Christ by the very means which he had hitherto used to recommend himself to God, namely, by prayer, alms-deeds, &c. St. Peter prevents the possibility of such a mistake, by telling him, that "whosoever *believeth* in Christ shall receive the remission of sins;" not, whosoever *obeyeth* him, but whosoever *believeth in* him. This shewed Cornelius that he must come to Christ *as a sinner*, to obtain the remission of his sins freely through his blood and righteousness: that he must not bring his own good deeds with him to purchase this blessing, but must receive it "without money and without price[k]."

We do not mean to say, that Cornelius could be saved if he lived in wilful disobedience to God; but, that he was neither to be accepted of the Father *for the merit of* his obedience, nor to obtain an interest in Christ *on account of* his obedience: the *meritorious* cause of his salvation must be the death of Christ, and the *instrumental* cause, or means, of his salvation must be a reliance on Christ. His obedience must *follow* the remission of sins *as a fruit and effect;* but it must *not precede* the remission of sins in any wise *as a cause.*]

In the text we may yet further notice,

II. The importance of those doctrines—

We can scarcely conceive any thing more strongly marked than this:

1. All the prophets bear witness to them—

[All the prophets are not equally full and explicit upon this subject; but we have the assurance of God himself that they were unanimous in their opinions upon it, and that they all bear testimony to these blessed truths. Consult Jeremiah, Daniel, Isaiah, Joel, and ask them how we are to obtain remission of sins? they will all say, CHRIST must be your righteousness[l]: it is HE alone that can make an end of sin[m]: call therefore upon HIM[n]; look unto HIM; glory in HIM: there is no Saviour besides HIM[o].

What greater proof can we have of the importance of these

[k] Isai. lv. 1. [l] Jer. xxiii. 6 [m] Dan. ix. 24
[n] Joel ii. 32. with Rom. x. 11, 13.
[o] Isai. xlv. 22—25. and xliii. 11.

doctrines, than that which arises from this harmony and concurrence of so many prophets, who lived at periods so distant from Christ and from each other?]

2. God wrought many miracles, in order to draw men's attention to them—

[In the first place he sent an angel to Cornelius, to inform him where he might find a minister capable of instructing him in these points. Then he vouchsafed a vision to Peter, in order to remove his scruples about going to him; and, to render it the more effectual, he renewed that vision thrice[p]. Then when the messengers were come from Cornelius, and Peter was yet doubting what his vision should mean, the Holy Ghost himself spake to him, and bade him go, doubting nothing[q].

Can we suppose that all this had respect to a matter of indifference, or of trifling import? or indeed that any thing but that which was essentially necessary to the salvation of every man was the ground of such singular and repeated interpositions?]

3. The Holy Ghost himself set his seal to the truth of them—

[*While Peter was delivering the very words of the text*, the Holy Ghost fell on the whole company, both Jews and Gentiles, as he had done on the Apostles six years before[r]. By this he set his seal to the truth of what was delivered. And it is an indisputable fact, that no other doctrine is ever made effectual to the conversion of men; and that wherever these doctrines are preached with fidelity, there sinners are converted from the error of their ways[s]: the Holy Ghost bears testimony to the word delivered; and, though he imparts not to any his miraculous powers, he does enlighten the minds of men, and sanctify their hearts.

What shall we say then? that the doctrines, thus attested, were of small importance, and, that it is of little consequence whether we receive or reject them?]

4. They are declared to be the *exclusive means of salvation*—

[No man, *under the Gospel dispensation*, can be saved, unless he cordially receive them. What might have been the eternal state of Cornelius, if he had been out of the reach of the Gospel, it is needless for us to inquire. He lived in an age when the Gospel was preached, and might, notwithstanding

[p] Acts xi. 5—10. [q] Acts xi. 12. [r] ver. 44. and xi. 15.
[s] Jer. xxiii. 22.

the prejudices of the Apostles, have been admitted to a participation of all its blessings, by submitting to circumcision first, and afterwards to baptism, provided he had really believed in Christ. There is reason therefore to fear that, notwithstanding his eminent attainments in natural religion, he could not have been saved without faith in Christ; because the angel that bade him send for Peter, informed him, that Peter should "tell him *words whereby he and all his house should be saved*[t]." And when the Apostles heard of his conversion to Christ, they exclaimed, "Then hath God to the Gentiles also granted *repentance unto life*[u]." If then so devout, so abstemious, so charitable, so zealous a worshipper of the true God, needed to believe in Christ in order to obtain the remission of his sins, how much more must we, who possess not half his virtues! Even the Apostle Paul, who was, "as touching the righteousness of the law, blameless," "counted it all but loss for Christ[x]:" moreover, he renounced his evangelical, no less than his legal, righteousness, that he might be accepted through Christ alone[y]. We therefore may be well assured, that *we* must do the same: for in his conduct with respect to this, he has given us an example which all must follow, if they would obtain salvation.

On the other hand, every person who truly receives them, shall certainly be saved. The word "whosoever" is of unlimited import: there is no exception: whether a man be a Jew or a heathen; whether he have been more or less wicked; whether he have a longer or a shorter time to live; whether he have a deeper insight into the mysteries of the Gospel, or be but just initiated into its fundamental truths; he shall assuredly receive through Christ the remission of his sins, the very instant he is enabled to believe in Christ. Whoever he be that desires to obtain salvation, there is but one direction to be given to him, and that is the direction given by Peter to Cornelius, and by Paul to the affrighted jailor; "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved[z]."

To occupy any more of your time in shewing the importance of the doctrines in the text, is superfluous. If it be not demonstrated by the foregoing considerations, we despair of ever establishing the simplest truth that can be proposed.]

APPLICATION—

1. Embrace the doctrines which are thus fully established—

[What is there to be placed in opposition to these testimonies? Nothing but the unfounded opinions of self-righteous Pharisees. O listen not to their delusions which will only

[t] Acts xi. 14. [u] Acts xi. 18. [x] Phil iii. 6, 7.
[y] Phil. iii. 8, 9. [z] Acts xvi. 30, 31.

deceive you to your ruin! Let them argue as they will, no other foundation can ever be laid for a sinner to build upon, but that which God has laid, even the Lord Jesus Christ — — —]

2. Improve them for the end for which they are delivered—

[God has sent them to you by my mouth, even as he did to Cornelius by Peter; and *for the same ends;* namely, that "you and your households should be saved by them." Consider your state as guilty and undone creatures, and as needing mercy at the hands of God: and lay hold upon the hope that is set before you. So shall you obtain "the remission of all your sins," and "be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation."]

OUTLINE NO. 1769

NECESSITY AND SUFFICIENCY OF THE GOSPEL SALVATION.

Acts xi. 13, 14. *Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.*

WHILST we deny that the Apostle Peter possessed any such supremacy above the other Apostles as the Papists ascribe to him, we most willingly acknowledge that very singular honours were conferred upon him by our Lord himself; and especially that of bearing the keys of the kingdom of heaven, or, in other words, of opening the kingdom of heaven both to Jews and Gentiles. We all know, that, on the day of Pentecost, it was his sermon which was made so pre-eminently useful for the converting of three thousand souls at once: nor can we doubt but that his ministry continued to be crowned with very abundant success. But, for the space of six years, he did not discern the just extent of the commission that had been given to the Apostles generally; namely, to "go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature;" and still less did he know what authority he had himself personally received, to open the door of salvation to the Gentiles, as he had already done to the Jews. Hence, when the time was come for the fuller manifestation of the truth to the Gentiles, he needed to have his prejudices

removed, by a special interposition of God for that purpose; and fresh instructions given him, as much as if the purposes of Heaven, in relation to that matter, had never been revealed to him. Indeed, all the other Apostles were in this respect as ignorant as he: for, when he had executed the divine commission, they called him to an account for it, as having been guilty of a most heinous transgression. He, however, in his vindication of his conduct, shewed them, that he had acted under the immediate direction of God, who had instructed Cornelius where to send for him, and had enjoined him also to comply with the request.

The particular direction given by the Angel to Cornelius, in relation to this matter, was, "Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter, who shall tell thee words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved." In which words we may see at once both *the necessity of the Gospel* for man's salvation, and *its sufficiency:* and these two points it is my intention to dwell on at this time.

Let us then consider,

I. The necessity of the Gospel—

Perhaps, in all the Scriptures, there will not be found a passage which more strongly declares this, than that before us.

The knowledge of the Gospel was necessary even for Cornelius—

[Cornelius was a peculiarly excellent character, even before he was acquainted with the Gospel: "He was a devout man: he feared God with all his house: though not belonging to the circumcision himself, he gave much alms to the Jewish people: and he prayed to God alway:" and so upright was he in his endeavours to approve himself to God, that his "prayers and alms came up for a memorial before God[a]," and "were had in remembrance in his sight[b]." Now, if any person could be saved without the Gospel, we might well suppose that it would be he. But, *now that the Gospel was fully revealed*, and *he was within the reach of it*, a distinct knowledge of its provisions, and a cordial acceptance of its offers, were neces-

[a] Acts x. 2, 4. [b] Acts x. 31.

sary for his salvation: and, rather than he should be left without an interest in it, God sent an angel to inform him where he might find a person who should "tell him those words whereby he should be saved." That such a man as Cornelius could not have been saved *under other circumstances*, is what I am by no means prepared to say: for I believe that, "in every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him:" and that, though no man can *merit* any thing at God's hands, yet God would rather work a miracle for such a person, than suffer him to perish for want of that measure of knowledge as, *under his circumstances*, was necessary for his salvation. But of such matters we can speak only by conjecture, because there is but little revealed concerning them. Of those who live under the Gospel dispensation, we can speak with certainty: and if the knowledge of the Gospel was necessary for Cornelius, then]

The knowledge of it must be necessary for us also—

[We are ready to imagine that a moral and religious character will give us a title to acceptance with God. But it is not by *that* that any man can be saved. There are "words which must be told us:" and what those words are, we know from the discourse of Peter on this occasion. We must be informed respecting the person, work, and office, of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must know, that "He, though Lord of all," became a man for us, and died upon the cross for the effecting of "our peace" with God, and was raised from the dead by God, and is appointed both to judge the world, and to save the world[c]. I say, to this the whole Scriptures bear witness; and this testimony we must receive as the ground of all our hopes: and by an humble affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ, as so revealed, we are to obtain "the remission of our sins[d]." There is no "other foundation than this on which any man can build[e];" "no other way whereby any man can come unto the Father[f];" "no other name given under heaven whereby any man can be saved[g]." Without a distinct knowledge of the Gospel, our prayers will not avail; nor will our alms avail: nor will a devout spirit, joined to the fear of God, avail: there is a way of salvation provided for us through the atoning blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; and in that way alone can we ever come to God, or find acceptance with him. If we attempt to seek his favour in any other way, we shall seek it in vain[h]."]

[c] Acts x. 36—42. [d] Acts x. 43. [e] 1 Cor. iii. 11.
[f] John xiv. 6. [g] Acts iv. 12.
[h] Rom. ix. 31—33. and x. 3, 4.

With the necessity of the Gospel for our salvation, let us contemplate also,

II. Its sufficiency—

This is fully and unequivocally declared in the history before us—

[The proofs of it here are manifold. Observe *the declaration of the angel:* no doubt was expressed by him respecting the efficacy of Peter's words for the desired end: all that was wanting was, that they should be received and relied upon by Cornelius and his family; and then the whole of them should be saved. Observe next, *the actual experience of Cornelius.* He received the word with all readiness, and confided in it; and the Holy Ghost descended upon him, and upon all who were with him[i]; and not only sealed the blessings of salvation on their souls, but endued them with miraculous powers in token of Christ's love to them, and for the extension of his kingdom by their means. Observe, yet further, *the testimony of all the Apostles.* They had hitherto been utterly averse to the idea of the Gentiles being saved by the Gospel: but when they heard the account of the whole transaction as given by St. Peter, "they glorified God for it; saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life[k]."]

The whole Scriptures also bear testimony to the same—

[We never find the smallest doubt expressed respecting the sufficiency of the Gospel salvation. No person is excepted from its offers, nor any sin from its absolving power: whilst "the blood of Christ cleanseth from *all sin*," "he is able to save to the uttermost *all* who come unto God by him." The provision made by the Gospel is sufficient, not for the small household of Cornelius only, but for the whole family of man. Could all be prevailed upon to receive Christ into their hearts by faith, not a human being would ever perish: "All who would believe in him should be justified from all things," and "be saved by him with an everlasting salvation."]

Having thus proclaimed to you the same blessed tidings which were delivered by Peter to Cornelius, let me entreat you to REMEMBER,

1. The honour which God puts upon the ministry of his word—

[God, in his mercy, determined to bring Cornelius and his family to the knowledge of the truth; and for this end he

[i] Acts x. 44, 47. [k] ver. 18.

sent an angel to inform Cornelius where he might find a minister competent to instruct him; and at the same time gave Peter repeated visions for the purpose of removing his religious scruples, and an audible voice from heaven, also, to authorize his going to a man that was uncircumcised. But what need was there of all these various operations? Why should not the angel declare the Gospel to Cornelius, instead of telling him where to send for a human instructor? God had revealed other things by angels: and why should he not *this?* The reason was, that, having ordained an established ministry, he would put honour on that ministry, and accomplish his purposes in that way which was best suited to the necessities of fallen man. In the case of the Ethiopian Eunuch, God did not use even his own revealed word for his conversion, without the intervention and ministry of Philip, whom he sent on purpose to instruct the inquiring student: and, in like manner, he sent Peter now, because he would have all to seek instruction through the instrumentality of those whom he himself had ordained to that high office. Let none, then, despise the ministry of the word, as though it might be dispensed with, or from a conceit that they can edify themselves to more advantage at home; for "the Gospel is God's treasure, though it be in earthen vessels[l];" and they only can hope to be enriched by it, who will receive it in God's appointed way. The waters of Jordan had no more intrinsic power than those of Abana and Pharpar: it was God's blessing alone that rendered them available for the curing of Naaman's leprosy: and it is that blessing also, which will alone prevail for the healing of our souls: and, if we will not seek that blessing in the channel where alone God has ordained it to flow, we shall in vain hope to obtain it through any other medium. To confirm this truth, Cornelius was ordered to send thirty or forty miles for Peter, to instruct him: and I hesitate not to say, that, as his labour was well repaid by the ministry of that holy man, so the labour of this blessed Apostle was richly recompensed by the success with which it was attended. And I may further say, that all the labour and expense attending either the stated ministry of the word, or the establishment of missions to heathen lands, are unworthy of a thought, in comparison of the benefits obtained by them[m].]

2. The light in which ministers and hearers should regard each other—

[The particular process by which Peter and Cornelius

[l] 2 Cor. iv. 7.

[m] Here *the blessings of a stated ministry* might be set forth, or *the importance of missions*, as the case might require.

were brought together were mere circumstances, with which we, in this day, have little concern. But every minister is an ambassador from God, *as truly*, though *not in the precise sense*, as Peter was: and the people to whom he is sent ought to receive his word, *as far as it accords with the voice of inspiration*, " as the word, not of man, but of God[n]." The precise state in which we should all meet together in the public ordinances, cannot possibly be more justly marked than in the history before us. Peter evidently went as a special messenger from God to Cornelius and his family; and having nothing in view but " to tell them words whereby they might all be saved." (All thoughts of *self* were as far from his mind as can possibly be imagined.) As for Cornelius and his family, their views in assembling together are depicted by themselves in those memorable words: " Now are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God[o]." None were brought by mere curiosity: none came for amusement: none looked to a mere man: all looked, through the man, to God; and received his message as from God himself. We wonder not at the effects which flowed from such a delivery, and such a reception, of God's blessed word. And should not we also experience a measure of the same effects, if we met together in the same spirit? Yes, we should; and to the want of this must be traced the inefficacy of our ordinances: we do not come together as we ought: neither minister nor hearers feel, as we ought, the importance of the occasion on which we are assembled. We come together too much in a customary way, not aware how much our eternal interests are at stake. Let us, my brethren, each in his place, endeavour to rectify our respective errors; and look up to God in future, that " the word preached may be more profitable; being more mixed with faith," both in Him who delivers, and " in those who hear it."]

[n] 1 Thess. ii. 13. [o] Acts x. 33.

OUTLINE NO. 1770

LIFE GRANTED TO THE GENTILES.

Acts xi. 18. *Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*

HERE we have an account of an event in which we all are deeply interested, The opening of the door of salvation to the Gentiles. Peter was the honoured instrument employed. " To him our blessed Lord

had given the keys of the kingdom of heaven," that he might open it both to Jews and Gentiles. To the Jews he had opened it, on the day of Pentecost; and now, after the lapse of six years, he opens it to the Gentiles also. In the words of my text we have,

I. The fact acknowledged—

A most remarkable fact it was. It was remarkable,

1. In its attendant circumstances—

[To enter fully into this subject, the preceding chapter, together with this, should be read throughout. Cornelius, a Roman centurion, a heathen, was favoured by Almighty God with a vision; and an angel was sent from heaven, to instruct him where to send for one who was enabled and authorized to preach unto him the way of salvation. The next morning, Peter also had a vision vouchsafed to him, in order to remove his scruples about going to a heathen. And, when he was musing upon the import of this vision, the servants of Cornelius arrived, having come a day's journey to request a visit from him; and the Spirit of God expressly enjoined him to comply with their solicitations. Accordingly, he went: and, having been informed by Cornelius by what authority his presence had been desired, he preached the Gospel to him and to his friends: and the Holy Ghost descended on the whole company, in confirmation of the word delivered, and marked them out as proper subjects to be received into the Church by baptism. Accordingly, "Peter commanded them to be baptized:" and, after a few days' abode with his new converts, left them, and went up to Jesusalem. Nor was the fact less remarkable,]

2. In its issue—

[A rumour of these events had already reached Jerusalem: and the Church there, with all the Apostles at their head, being filled with indignation against Peter "for going in to one that was uncircumcised, and eating with him," demanded of him the reasons for so extraordinary a conduct. Upon this, he reported to them all that had occurred, both respecting the vision given to Cornelius, and that vouchsafed to himself; and particularly the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them all, precisely as on the Apostles themselves on the day of Pentecost. This convinced them, that what he had done was of Divine appointment; and that "God had to the Gentiles also, no less than to the Jews, granted repentance unto life." The fact was now unquestionable; and they could not but acknowledge it.]

But, to enter into the true spirit of the words, we must notice in them,

II. The surprise manifested—

The Apostles, even after an interval of six years, had no idea of the extension of the Gospel to the Gentiles—

[They had, by the law of Moses, been taught to regard the uncircumcised Gentiles as unclean, and to avoid all needless connexion with them. The whole ceremonial law was intended as a kind of partition wall between them and the Gentiles. And even the Lord Jesus Christ himself had declared, that "he was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel;" and that "he could not take the children's bread, and cast it unto dogs," which was deemed the proper appellation of the heathen. And when he had sent out his seventy Disciples, he gave them an especial commandment, "Into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not." How then could Peter, with any propriety, go to a heathen family, and take up his abode with them? True, the circumstances, which he had related, justified his procedure: but still it was unaccountable, that God should so vary his dispensations, after having confined his revelation to the descendants of Abraham for two thousand years, and left all the heathen world in darkness and in the shadow of death during the whole of that period.]

But now, to their utter amazement, the wall of partition between them and the Gentiles was thrown down—

[That it was so, admitted of no doubt. But still, the reasons of this dispensation they could not yet see. True, the Lord Jesus had said to them, "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." But they supposed this could only refer to the Jews, who were dispersed among the Gentiles, it never could refer to the Gentiles themselves. *They* could never be placed on a level with the descendants of Abraham; or be made to inherit the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant: they who were "strangers and foreigners could never be made fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God." Yet so it was; and they could not contradict it: and therefore, in utter amazement, they cried, "Then hath God to the Gentiles also granted repentance unto life." How it is, we know not; but that so it is, we are sure: since the account now given us has confirmed it, beyond a possibility of doubt.]

We see, however, yet further, in these words,

III. The approbation expressed—

In this light, beyond a doubt, they are to be viewed—

[The prejudices, which had so long blinded their eyes, were now removed: and a new principle of love sprung up in their hearts; so that they could welcome the accession of the Gentiles to their community, and the participation of the whole heathen world in the privileges which they themselves had so long exclusively enjoyed. Hence we are told, that they not only "held their peace," but "glorified God, saying, Then hath God to the Gentiles also granted repentance unto life."]

And in what light should they be viewed by *us?*

[Cornelius himself was not more interested in this event than *we*. To this event we look, as the period from whence to date all our privileges. From this time the Gospel was freely preached to the Gentiles; from amongst whom thousands of converts were made, yea, and millions also, insomuch that, in a few years, the whole Roman empire was filled with them. From that time has the Gospel been transmitted, till it has come even unto us: and we enjoy all its privileges and its blessings, as much as our hearts can wish. With what joy and gratitude, then, should we exclaim, "To us Gentiles hath God granted repentance unto life!" Yes, in this event we should contemplate our own interests, as well as those of Cornelius; and should mark with our most distinguished approbation the mercy thus freely vouchsafed to the whole world.]

But we must not confine our views of this passage to the event which then took place. We must get it repeated in our own persons, and experienced in our own souls—

We need salvation no less than Cornelius and his company—

[Cornelius was of a most lovely character; and though not enlightened by the Gospel, was doubtless eminently distinguished by a preparatory work of God upon his soul, and admirably fitted for a reception of the Gospel by the grace of God[a]. Yet it was by the Gospel only that he was to be saved[b]; since, whatever preparatory attainments a man may have, "there is no name given under heaven whereby any

[a] Acts x. 2, 4. [b] ver. 14.

man can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ." Know then, brethren, all of you without exception, that ye must know Christ, before ye can be interested in his salvation — — —]

And this salvation ye must seek through God's appointed ordinances—

[God has set apart an order of men on purpose to instruct the world. He could have communicated the knowledge of salvation to Cornelius, as easily as he could direct him where to find an authorized instructor. But he would rather accumulate vision upon vision, and miracle upon miracle, to honour his own appointed ordinances, than convey the knowledge of eternal life in the neglect of them. Accordingly, Cornelius sent a whole day's journey to get instruction from Peter; and Peter went a whole day's journey to impart it to one single family: from whence we learn, that no pains are to be spared, either in seeking or imparting divine knowledge; and that the more strictly we adhere to God's appointed methods of obtaining it, the more confidently we may hope to succeed in our endeavours.]

But you must seek it with becoming humility—

[Behold the posture of Cornelius and his company: "Now are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God[c]." This is the state of mind in which you also, my brethren, are to come up to the house of God. You are not to come from mere form, or from curiosity; nor are you to come with a mind clouded by prejudices or prepossessions. You are to come with docile minds, ready to receive, as from God, all that God speaks to you by us, so far as it accords with his written word. You must come also with a determination, through grace, to embrace it all without gainsaying, and to obey it all without reserve.]

And we have the same instruction for you as was communicated by Peter to that assembly—

[We "preach peace to you by Jesus Christ[d];" and declare, that, as there is no reconciliation with God but through his atoning blood, so "all that believe in him shall be justified from all things." In confirmation of this, we appeal to every part of the inspired volume, shewing, that "to Him give all the prophets witness, that, through the name of Christ, whosoever believeth in him shall receive the remission of sins[e]."]

And to this will the Holy Spirit bear witness, as in the case before us—

[c] Acts x. 33. [d] Acts x. 36. [e] Acts x. 43. with xiii. 38. 39

[He will not, indeed, impart miraculous powers, as in that day; but he will give testimony to the truth that Christ is a Saviour, an all-sufficient Saviour, to all who call upon him[f]: he will seal it upon the heart, and will render it the means of comforting and sanctifying the souls of all who truly receive it.]

But we must "repent," even as Cornelius and his associates did—

[Though "life" is not *by* repentance, but *by Jesus Christ*, there is no life to the impenitent. Life and repentance are never separated in the dispensations of God; nor can they be separated in our experience. Even though we have been as exemplary as ever Cornelius was, we are yet sinners; and must abase ourselves before God, as deserving of his wrath and indignation: and must "flee to Christ for refuge, as to the one hope that is set before us."]

To God, however, we must look to vouchsafe us this gift—

[You cannot but see how it was "*granted*" to them, in every stage of its progress. The first intimation to Cornelius that he needed a Saviour, was given him in the vision; and the direction where to send for instruction was given by an angel of God; even the name of the person, and the town where he dwelt, and the very house where he lived. All the obstacles which were in the way were removed by the vision to Peter: and "the words were put into the mouth of Peter, whereby Cornelius and his house were to be saved[g]:" and the whole was applied by the Holy Spirit to their souls. Thus, then, must you also look unto God, to instruct your minds, and to impress the truth with effectual energy upon your souls. Do but this, my brethren; and, as it was said with rapture by the Church at Jerusalem, "Behold, God hath unto the Gentiles granted repentance unto life!" so shall it now be said amongst the angels of God in heaven: "Behold, God hath to that assembly granted repentance unto life." Yes, those benevolent beings, though in the very presence of God, "rejoice over one sinner that repenteth." O that they may have joy over you, my brethren, this day! and may "God be glorified" in every one of you, to all eternity, for Christ's sake! Amen, and Amen.]

[f] Acts x. 44. [g] ver. 14.

OUTLINE NO. 1771

DUTY OF CLEAVING TO THE LORD.

Acts xi. 22, 23. *Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the Church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.*

TO see men converted unto God is a source of very exalted joy: still, however, that joy is by no means unmixed. In viewing a tree full of blossoms, we almost irresistibly contemplate the dangers to which they are exposed, and the probability there is that many of them at least will never come to maturity. Our blessed Lord, in the parable of the Sower, has taught us to expect a similar issue in relation to the fruits produced by the Gospel: and experience confirms the truth of his representations. Hence, whilst we rejoice over young converts, we are constrained to "rejoice with trembling." Agreeably to this observation, we find the Apostles invariably labouring "to confirm the souls of the Disciples[a]," and "persuading them to continue in the grace of God[b]." Such was the conduct of Barnabas towards the Disciples at Antioch: "He was glad when he saw the grace of God" manifested in their conversion; but, being "jealous over them with a godly jealousy," he "exhorted them all, without any distinction, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." This exhortation of his leads us to contemplate *the dangers* and *the duties* of the Lord's people.

I. The dangers—

Had the new converts been in no danger of departing from the Lord, they had not needed such an earnest exhortation to cleave unto him. But the truth is, that all Christians are in danger.

1. From the ungodly world—

[a] Acts xiv. 21, 22. [b] Acts xiii. 43.

[It is not easy to say which are more replete with danger to the Christian, the frowns or the smiles of the ungodly world. Their hatred is often difficult to be borne. When persecution arises from those who are nearly related to us, or invested with authority over us, or on whom our temporal interests materially depend; and more especially when it rages to such an extent that we must forsake all to follow Christ; it requires much grace to meet the trial aright, and much strength to maintain our stedfastness in the Lord's ways. We are apt to give way to that "fear of man which bringeth a snare." On one occasion, Paul was forsaken by all the Church at Rome, through a fear of participating in his trials[c]: nor can any man tell how he shall demean himself under such circumstances, till he is actually placed in them.

Sometimes it happens that our friends, instead of using violence, endeavour to divert us from our purpose by kindness: and then we feel it ten times more difficult to oppose their wishes: we begin to think that it is better to make compliances, and not adhere too strictly to the requisitions of the Gospel. We flatter ourselves, that by such means we shall soften their prejudices against religion, and perhaps win them to Christ: but in this way we are in danger of wounding our own consciences, and of relapsing altogether into the ways and spirit of the world. A measure of tenderness and conciliation we highly approve; but it may easily be carried too far, and bring us to seek that "friendship of the world which is enmity with God[d]."]

2. From our own corrupt hearts—

[The heart is naturally carnal; and it is but in part renewed even in the best of men: "the flesh still lusteth against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit against the flesh[e]." Paul himself complained that he had "a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin which was in his members[f]." Hence the cares or pleasures of life soon regain an ascendant over us, if we in the least relax our watchfulness against them; or perhaps, like David, we fall into the grossest crimes. Demas has shewn us how awfully the most distinguished professors of religion may depart from God[g]: and in the thorny-ground hearers, we see how all the life of religion may be lost, whilst the outward form of it remains unaltered[h]. After our Lord's exhortation to his own Apostles, we may see that there is no sin whatever into which we may not fall, if we be for one moment left to the workings of our own evil hearts[i]. Indeed, independent of any gross sin

[c] 2 Tim. iv. 16. [d] Jam. iv. 4. [e] Gal. v. 17.
[f] Rom. vii. 23. [g] 2 Tim. iv. 10. [h] Matt. xiii. 22.
[i] Luke xxi. 34

to which we may be allured, the heart is of itself so indisposed to spiritual exercises, that it will soon faint and be weary in them, if its strength be not daily renewed by the Spirit of God. Hence that direction of the Apostle, "Be not weary in well-doing[k]."]

3. From the temptations of Satan—

[One of the first devices of Satan is, to persuade men that so much exertion in the divine life is not necessary; and, as he did respecting our Lord, he will instigate some friend to whisper in our ear, "Spare thyself." If he do not succeed in this way, he will suggest to us that our efforts are in vain; that we never were truly converted unto God; that we are not in the number of God's elect; that we have committed the unpardonable sin; and we had better secure the happiness that is within our reach, than labour for that which we can never obtain. Alas! how many has he deceived by these wiles, and ruined by these devices! Well then may we be on our guard against him, since we are told that "he is always walking about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." There had not been such armour provided for our use, if we had not a very arduous conflict to maintain[l].]

4. From the very members of the Church itself—

[St. Paul warned the elders of Ephesus that they were in great "peril from false brethren;" and that not only from other quarters, but "even from among their own selves, some would arise, speaking perverse things, and drawing away disciples after them[m]." And who that is conversant with the sacred writings, or with the state of the Christian Church at this day, need be told what havoc false brethren have made, sometimes "subverting whole houses," and "bringing in damnable heresies, whereby they bring destruction both on themselves and multitudes of unsuspecting followers[n]." Even where persons do not go to these extremes, they may diffuse a vain, conceited and contentious spirit, and beguile to an awful extent the simple-minded. We all know how easy it is to receive bad impressions; and how difficult to get rid of them, when once received. There is, if I may so call it, a virgin simplicity, which is the chief beauty and excellence of a Christian, and which, if once lost, is very hardly recovered; and to preserve it amongst a people, requires all the vigilance of the most active minister, as well as all the caution of the people themselves[o].]

From contemplating the dangers of the Lord's people, we are naturally led to consider also,

[k] Gal. vi. 9. [l] Eph. vi. 11, 12. [m] Acts xx. 29, 30.
[n] 2 Pet. ii. 1. and iii. 17. [o] 2 Cor. xi. 2, 3.

II. The duties—

These are manifestly contained in the words of our text, partly by implication, and partly as directly expressed—

1. We should be aware of our danger—

[There is not any thing more prejudicial to the Christian than a presumptuous security: yet how extremely common is it in the Church of God! The professors of religion see, and condemn, this evil amongst their less-enlightened neighbours, and yet are unconscious of its existence in themselves. They even see it in each other; but almost every one conceives himself to be an exception from the rest: others may be ensnared by the world, or deceived by their own corrupt hearts, or beguiled by Satan, or drawn aside into some wrong sentiments or habits by their brethren; but *I* am clear; *I* am right; *I* am in no danger. But let all of us look back, and trace the workings of our own hearts, and we shall find reason to acknowledge either that we have already, on many occasions, been impeded in our Christian course, or that, if we have not, it has been owing to the exceeding and abundant grace of God towards us. We should be deeply sensible of our own frailty; and should shun the means and occasions of sin, as much as sin itself. We should "not be high-minded, but fear;" and, "whilst we most think that we stand, we should take heed lest we fall." Not that it is desirable for any one to be brought into bondage, or to live under the influence of slavish fear: but, an humble filial fear is desirable at all times; such a fear, I mean, as drives us to the Lord for safety, and leads us to put our whole trust in him. In this sense, "blessed is the man that feareth alway."]

2. We should have a fixed and determined purpose to cleave unto the Lord—

[Let me not be misunderstood, as if I would recommend any one to make resolutions in his own strength: the example of Peter may shew us the folly of such confidence: he who one hour declared that he would sooner die with Christ than deny him, denied him the next hour with oaths and curses. But in the Lord's strength we may, and must resolve. "My heart is fixed, my heart is fixed, I will sing and give praise unto the Lord," was a resolution worthy to be formed; as was that also of Joshua, that though all Israel should depart from God, "he and his house would serve the Lord." Indeed without such a fixed purpose of heart, we shall become the sport of every temptation. We must determine, through grace, that we will be faithful to our God; that neither the allurements of life, nor the terrors of death, shall induce us

to turn aside from following him. We must keep our eye single in this respect: we must have one object, and one alone, in view: to honour God must be the one aim of our lives. In relation to this, we must maintain with equal firmness the principles and the practice of Christianity: we must "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering," and "be steadfast, unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord."]

"Suffer ye then a word of EXHORTATION"—

[That the subject is deserving of your deepest attention, cannot be doubted: the character given of Barnabas, in the words following our text, is a pledge of it; "He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith." He was "a son of consolation;" and therefore we may be sure he did not needlessly endeavour to distress the souls of any: yet he exhorted *all* without exception, because *all* are in danger of falling, and of "making shipwreck of the faith." Consider then, beloved, what obligations you are under to cleave unto the Lord. Has he so highly favoured you with tokens of his love and mercy, that you should forsake him at last? Has our blessed Saviour shed his blood for you, that you should "tread him under your feet" by relapsing into sin? Has the Holy Spirit enlightened, quickened, sanctified you, that you should "do despite to him," and "quench" his sacred motions? Have you "found God a wilderness to you," that you should desert him, and go back again to the world for happiness? Is it wise to "leave the fountain for broken cisterns?" Is it likely to make you happier even in this world; and, if not, how much less will it do so in the world to come? Did you never read, that they who turn back, "turn back unto perdition;" and that "God's soul can have no pleasure in them?" Be on your guard then, ere it be too late. But if any will not take warning, I shall conclude my address to them with the solemn declaration of Moses, just before his death; "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life that ye may live, and that ye may love the Lord your God, and *cleave* unto him; for HE is your life, and the length of your days[p].]

[p] Deut. xxx. 19, 20.

OUTLINE NO. 1772

BENEVOLENCE OF THE CHURCH OF ANTIOCH.

Acts xi. 29, 30. *Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judæa: which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.*

GOD is love; and all who have been truly taught of God, are transformed into his image: their selfish passions are in a good measure subdued; and their delight is in the exercise of the most benevolent affections. To such an extent was the principle of love carried by the first converts, that the rich parted with their estates and goods, to form one common stock for the subsistence of the whole Church, thereby reducing themselves to a level with the poorest of their brethren. The Church of Antioch also were very exemplary in their exercise of this grace. They were informed by prophecy, that there would, ere long, be a famine throughout all the Roman empire: and therefore, concluding that the pressure would be particularly felt by their brethren at Jerusalem, where there were none able to succour their distressed neighbours, on account of the voluntary poverty they had brought upon themselves, they raised a collection, and sent it to the elders of that Church, who, from their knowledge of the various individuals, might dispose of their alms to the greatest possible advantage.

This benevolence of theirs shall be the subject of our present discourse. We will,

I. Contemplate it for your instruction—

In the account of it which is here given us, there are two things to be noticed;

1. The occasion that called it forth—

[A prophet, named Agabus, foretold a famine which should involve the whole Roman empire in extreme distress: and, as he had recently come from Jerusalem, it is probable that he stated some circumstances in relation to the Church in that place, which would occasion the affliction to be felt there

with more than ordinary severity. Immediately the Church at Antioch, feeling their obligations to those at Jerusalem, to whom they were indebted for all the spiritual benefits they enjoyed, and justly conceiving that this was a peculiarly proper season for requiting them with temporal benefits, which on account of their comparative opulence they were able to do, immediately raised a collection among themselves, for the relief of their brethren at Jerusalem when the season of their trial should arrive.

Now from hence we learn some very important lessons; the first of which is, *That every word of God should be regarded by us as a ground of action.* The event predicted did not come to pass for some time: yet was the provision made for it instantaneously, as much as if it had existed at that very moment. The prediction itself was to them a sufficient pledge that the season would arrive, whether at an earlier or more remote period: the times and seasons were in God's hands; but their duty was to provide for the occasion beforehand; and therefore they exerted themselves without delay. How happy would it be for us, if we regarded every declaration of God with similar awe and reverence! O let us not think that remoteness of time will make any difference as to the certainty of future events; for every thing that God has spoken in reference to the eternal world, will as certainly take place, as if the events were close at hand; and it is our duty now to act, as if we were assured that a few hours only would intervene between the prediction and the accomplishment.

Another lesson which their conduct teacheth us is, *That benevolence is essential to the Christian character.* Their benevolence was altogether spontaneous, the effect of a principle universally operative among them. That principle is altogether inseparable from the Christian character; for, "if we love not our brother whom we have seen, how can we love God whom we have not seen?" We should consider "all, but especially the household of faith," as "brethren;" and should regard our property as a talent committed to us by our common Father, for the benefit of the whole family. "We should not seek our own things, but the things which are Jesus Christ's" — — —]

2. The manner in which it was exercised—

[Behold their *zeal! all* were animated by the same spirit; and "every one" exerted himself "*according to his ability.*" Had they been disposed to indulge a selfish spirit, they might have found excuses enough for withholding present supplies. "The occasion had not yet arrived: they themselves would be subject to the same calamity, and were more bound to provide for their immediate neighbours than for others at the

distance of several hundred miles." But they listened not to any such suggestions: it was sufficient for them that an opportunity had occurred for the exercise of love, and for the honouring of their Lord; and therefore they improved it instantly to the utmost of their power. Thus also should *we:* "Whatsoever our hand findeth to do, we should do it with our might:" and especially in administering relief to the Lord's people, we should not estimate our liberality by the mere amount of our donations, so much as by our ability to give; since in God's sight the widow, with her two mites, gave more than all the rich, who, out of their abundance, had cast large sums into the treasury.

We admire too their *prudence.* They could not themselves go to Jerusalem to inspect the state of the Church, and administer relief with their own hands; they therefore sent their money to the elders of that Church, who, by their local knowledge, were qualified, and by their exalted piety were disposed, to dispense the alms in the most equitable and effectual manner. In this also they have left us a very instructive lesson, to attend with the utmost care to the manner in which we dispose of our alms: for, as the withholding of alms is sinful parsimony, so indiscreet charity is criminal profuseness.]

Without stopping to multiply lessons of instruction from their benevolence, we will now,

II. Propose it for your imitation—

We have at this time,

1. A *similar occasion* for benevolence—

[* * * [a]]

2. *Similar means* of exercising it—

[They committed to the elders of the Church at Jerusalem the task of selecting the objects, and apportioning the alms; and thankfully availed themselves of the labours of others, to carry into effect their benevolent designs. Now amongst us there are many united into a society, for the express purpose of finding out the wants of the poor, and of administering also to their spiritual necessities[b]: whatever, therefore, your liberality shall contribute, will be disposed of by them to much

* * * [a] Here state the particular occasion; suppose for *a Benevolent Society;* viz. the pressure of the times, the want especially in time of sickness, and, *above all, the need of spiritual instruction and consolation,* which are of infinitely greater value than any temporal benefits whatever.

[b] Here state how they conduct their affairs.

better effect than if you were to bestow your alms upon the poor with your own hands, unless you could at the same time inquire into all the circumstances of their different cases, and stop to unite spiritual instruction with your temporal relief. These persons, like the elders at Jerusalem, cannot, out of their own funds, do good to any great extent; nor would their visits be well received by the poor, if they tendered nothing but good advice: but, when they can impart also some relief for the body, they are more kindly welcomed as instructors for the soul: the hearts, as well as the houses, of the poor are easier of access, when the way is smoothed by "a gift in the bosom."]

3. *Similar obligations* to exercise it—

[They felt the force of redeeming love; and judged that they administered to Christ himself, whilst they relieved him in his distressed members. And are these motives to benevolence lessened by the lapse of time? Are not we as much bound to devote ourselves, and all that we have, to Christ, as they could be? In some respects, our obligations to exert ourselves are greater than theirs: for the sole object of *their* benevolence was, to bestow *temporal* relief; whereas *that*, though an important, is a subordinate, consideration with *us*, who aim principally at promoting the *eternal* welfare of our fellow-creatures. If then we profess to love the Lord Jesus Christ, let us now approve our love to him, by our zealous exertions, and liberal contributions[c].]

[c] This II[d] head of the discourse might be treated thus;
1. We have a similar occasion for benevolence.
2. Let us exercise it in the same manner with readiness, with generosity—with a special regard to Christ as our common Head and Saviour.

OUTLINE NO. 1773

PETER'S DELIVERANCE FROM PRISON.

Acts xii. 5. *Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.*

THE Scriptures inform us, that "God's counsel shall stand, and that he will do all his pleasure." Let the combinations against him be ever so formidable, the ultimate issue of the contest is certain[a]. Whatever circumstances therefore we may be in, we may safely commit our cause to him with confidence

[a] Ps. ii. 4—6.

and composure[b]. We cannot conceive a finer illustration of this subject, than that which is contained in the account of Peter's deliverance from prison.

Let us make some observations upon,

I. His danger—

This was imminent indeed; whether we consider,

1. The crime of which he was accused—

[Had he been guilty of sedition or murder? No. What then had he done that had incensed Herod, and rendered his apprehension and death a subject of universal satisfaction? He had preached the Gospel with indefatigable zeal, and had laboured to convert both Jews and Gentiles to the knowledge of Christ. This was an offence that could not be expiated, but by his blood. All that had preceded him in the same path from the beginning of the world, had incurred the resentment of their contemporaries; and, almost without exception, had suffered death for their fidelity; as Abel, and all the prophets, abundantly testify. And we cannot but wonder, that, when persons are hated, reviled, and persecuted, simply for righteousness' sake, (as thousands in this day are, as well as in former times,) it does not immediately occur to their persecutors, that these very sufferings are *a testimony in their favour*[c]; inasmuch as they mark a close resemblance between *them*, and the persecuted saints of old. But as long as "men love darkness rather than light," they will hate, and extinguish too if they can, the light that shines around them.]

2. The state to which he was reduced—

[He was in prison, chained to two soldiers, (one on either hand,) and guarded by sixteen, four of them at a time. His friends, though numerous, had no power to rescue him; nor had he any in Herod's court to intercede for him. Nor was there now time for any favourable occurrences to arise; for this was his very last night; and on the morrow he was to be brought forth for public execution: and all his own countrymen were anxiously waiting for the last tragical scene, and hoping within a few hours to feast their eyes with his blood. What hope then remained for him? Die he must: nor did there appear the smallest prospect, but that the fate which had already removed James, awaited him.]

But "what is impossible with man, is possible with God;" as we see in,

II. His deliverance—

[b] Ps. xi. 1—4 [c] Luke xxi. 13.

Mark *the means* used for his deliverance—

[From human interference there was no hope: but the poor trembling Disciples did not yet despair: they knew that "whereinsoever the enemies of the Church might deal proudly, God was above them." To God therefore they addressed themselves with redoubled importunity: and continued all night in unceasing prayer for him. What foolish means would these appear to those who knew how closely he was guarded, and how determinately both Herod and the Jews were bent upon his death!—But, if God be omnipotent, prayer, which interests God for us, may be called omnipotent also. What has it not done? It has opened and shut the heavens; vanquished armies; saved kingdoms; raised the dead;—and it has an express promise from God, that, whatever the subject of it be, (provided it be agreeable to his will,) the requests urged by two or three, with united faith and fervour, shall certainly be granted.

O that *we*, as individuals, as a Church, as a nation, did but justly appreciate the power of prayer! how safe should we be from enemies, and how happy under the protection of our God! — — —]

See also *the manner* in which he was delivered—

[God heard the supplications of his people; and marked, by the very time and manner of his interposition, what it was that prevailed for his deliverance. Access to Peter, though barred with respect to men, was as open as ever to God, and to angels, as his ministering servants. God therefore sent an angel to effect his deliverance: and behold, how speedily the work was done! the chains fell off his hands; the keepers and soldiers were constrained in some way or other, so that they could make no resistance; and the iron gate that entered into the city, opened to them of its own accord. So surprising was this deliverance, that Peter himself could not conceive it to be true, but thought it was all passing in a mere vision. And, when he went to the house where the people were praying for him, and the damsel who kept the door affirmed that it was Peter who stood knocking at the door, and that she knew his voice, they told her she was mad: and when they could not silence her positive assertions, they said, "It must be his angel." Had they duly considered, they would have seen that he was expressly given to their prayers; and that God had fulfilled to them his own gracious promise, that "before they called he would answer, and, while they were yet speaking, he would hear[d]" — — —]

We may LEARN from hence,

[d] Isa. lxv. 24. See a similar instance, Dan. ix. 20, 21, 23.

1. The blessedness of serving God—

[It may appear at first, that there is no inference less deducible from the subject than this: for, is there any blessedness in imprisonment, and bonds, and death? But look at Peter on the very night previous to his intended execution: he is sleeping as soundly as if no evil whatever awaited him; insomuch that the extraordinary light which shone into the prison did not interrupt his slumbers; nor did he awake, till "the angel smote him on the side." Behold too the interposition of God for him! Was an angel wanted to liberate him from prison? an angel is sent from heaven on purpose; and soldiers, chains, bars, gates, have no longer any power to confine him. Surely then, if to enjoy such composure in the immediate prospect of death, and such protection from God when all human help has failed, be blessed, it is blessed to serve our God, who vouchsafes such mercies to his faithful people — — — Be not ye afraid then of the frowns of men: but fear God, who is alike able to save or to destroy — — — Seek your happiness in doing the Divine will; and then you may safely commit your every concern to him, knowing, that if God be for you, none can, with any effect, exert themselves against you — — —]

2. The efficacy of united prayer—

[Prayer may appear for a time to be offered in vain: "God may bear long with his people," even when they are most importunate. But we must not mistake delays for denials: "God has never said to any, 'Seek ye my face' in vain." Circumstances may arise, wherein it will be more for the good even of the Church itself that prayer should not be answered precisely in the way that we might wish. This doubtless was the case with respect to James, whose fortitude in suffering martyrdom was more useful to the Church than his continued labours would have been. But where any matter will really issue in God's glory and the Church's good, we may ask for it with an absolute assurance that it shall be granted. No nation since the establishment of Christianity ever enjoyed greater mercies from God than ours; and if we knew the history of it as it is recorded in heaven, I doubt not but that the prayers of God's people would be found to have wrought more for us, than all our fleets and armies have ever done. Let all of us then give ourselves unto prayer in our secret chambers: let societies for prayer be established; and those which already exist carry on their united efforts with unceasing ardour. Let us not be contented with a brief mention of our necessities to God, but plead earnestly with him for the relief of them, and "give him no rest, till he arise and make our Jerusalem a praise in the earth."]

OUTLINE NO. 1774

THE EVIL OF PRIDE.

Acts xii. 21—23. *And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.*

IN almost all the instances of judicial punishment recorded in Scripture, we see a remarkable correspondence between the punishment, and the sin on account of which it was inflicted: and it seems to be especially designed of God, in order that he might be the more manifestly "known in the judgments which he executeth." In the passage before us, we are informed, that Herod was greatly offended with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but, at the intercession of his own chamberlain, he forgave them. On this occasion he delivered to them an oration, probably in part at least on the subject of his own clemency: and they, struck with the splendour of his appearance, and perhaps with the force of his eloquence, or, more probably, desiring to conciliate him by flattery, exclaimed, that the voice which they heard, was the voice of a god, rather than a man. With these plaudits Herod was highly gratified: and instantly God, by the instrumentality of an angel, smote him with a disease in his bowels, so acute and terrible, that, as the Jewish historian informs us, he was constrained to acknowledge before that very assembly, that God had punished him for not rejecting with abhorrence their impious acclamations, and that they would soon see an end of their *god*.—Accordingly, the worms that were thus formed in his body, preyed upon his vitals, and devoured him in the space of about five days: so that his degradation was as manifest as his pride had been presumptuous.

We propose to consider more fully,

I. His sin—

Whether the excellence of his oration was real or imaginary, his crime was the same; "He gave not God the glory of it." Now this is, in truth, as common a sin as any that can be named: for where is there a person possessed of either natural endowments, or acquired distinctions, who does not pride himself in them, instead of giving the glory of them to the Lord? The female thinks but little of God, when her beauty is admired; or the man, when he is celebrated for his strength and valour. The man of learning, or of skill in arts, or who has advanced himself by successful industry to great opulence, readily accepts the adulation paid to his talents and success; little thinking that it is "God alone who has made him to differ" from others, or "given him the power to get wealth." Perhaps the generality will allow this to be an infirmity incident to our nature; but few, if any, conceive of it as an heinous sin; whereas it is, in reality, a sin of awful magnitude. It is,

1. A denial of God's goodness—

[God is "the Author of every good and perfect gift," in creation, in providence, and in grace. Whatever we possess, we must say with the Apostle, "He that hath wrought us for this self-same thing, is God[a]." If any person have a right to ascribe glory to himself, methinks it is the conqueror, whose valour overcomes his enemy: but God in a particular manner charged his people, when they should be brought into the quiet possession of the land of Canaan, not to imagine that "their power, or the might of their hand, had gotten them that wealth," but to acknowledge it all as given them by their God[b]. When therefore we withhold these acknowledgments, we do, in fact, deny that they are due to God, and impiously assume to ourselves the honour that is due to him alone. In a word, we tread in the very steps of Herod, and commit the sin which brought on him such tokens of God's displeasure.]

2. An invasion of his prerogative—

"God has made all things *for himself;*" and "his glory he will not give to another." But, if we take to ourselves the glory which is due to him, we put ourselves, as it were, into his place, and become a god unto ourselves. This may appear

[a] 2 Cor. v. 5. [b] Deut. viii. 7. 11—14, 18, 19.

too strong a representation; but it is the very construction which Jehovah himself puts upon such conduct. The city of Tyre was greatly enriched, and raised to a high rank among the surrounding nations: and the governors, instead of acknowledging the providence of God in their elevation, ascribed it wholly to themselves, and confided in it as a source of continued security. Hear now how God speaks to them respecting it: "Son of man, say unto the Prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord God; Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, 'I am God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas;' yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God[c]." Nor let it be imagined that this is done only by an actual assumption of these honours to ourselves: Herod did not *claim* the honours that were ascribed to him; but he was *pleased with* them; and *acquiesced in* the judgment of his admirers, instead of reproving it. Paul and Barnabas, when divine honours were offered to them, rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, and expostulated with them in the strongest terms[d]: and it was Herod's sin that he accepted the flattery, instead of reprobating it with indignation. In like manner the receiving with complacency the flattering unction of human applause, trifling as it may appear to us, is a very heinous sin in the sight of God.]

The evil of his sin may be further seen in the greatness of,

II. His punishment—

Pride, above all things, provokes "a jealous God:" and the whole creation are ready to vindicate the honour of his injured Majesty. As, in the plagues of Egypt, frogs and lice were ready to inflict punishment on the hardened monarch, so, in Herod's case, "worms" sprang forth, as it were, into existence, to avenge the quarrel of Jehovah. Nor shall such an impious disposition ever pass unpunished.

1. God has punished it in many instances—

[See where man has made himself *the author* of the great things which have been wrought by him; how strongly has God resented it[e]! — — — See where man has made himself *the end* of his own actions; how fearfully has God manifested his indignation against the offending person[f]! — — — See where only *an undue complacency* has been felt, as

[c] Ezek. xxviii. 2—10. Compare also Hab. i. 15, 16.
[d] Acts xiv. 9—15. [e] Isai. x. 12—15. and xxxvii. 23—29
[f] Dan. iv. 30—33.

arising from the possession of the things which God himself has given; even *that* has excited great displeasure in the breast of the Almighty, and caused him to inflict the heaviest judgments[g] — — —]

2. He will punish it wherever it is indulged—

[If such a disposition be habitually indulged, God regards it as a proof of hypocrisy[h]: and, though he is ever ready to give grace to the humble, he will assuredly resist, and abase, the proud[i] — — — Though it break not forth into gross inconsistencies of conduct, yet, if it be harboured in the heart, we shall be held in utter abomination in the sight of God[k] — — —]

REFLECTIONS—

1. What need have we to watch the motions of our hearts!

[God looks at the heart, and "searches it," and sees every thought of it[l], and puts the true construction upon every motion of it, and will call us into judgment for all its most secret imaginations[m]. Alas! how many proud, conceited, self-complacent thoughts has he there beheld! Do we not then need to humble ourselves before him, and to "pray, that the thoughts of our hearts may be forgiven us[n]?" — — —]

2. How careful should we be of using any flattering words!

[Men flatter others because they know that flattery is pleasant to the carnal mind: but it is that very pleasure which offends God, and brings down his judgments on the soul. How cruel then is it to expose a brother to such a danger! Would we put poison into his hands just to gratify his palate, when we knew that it would speedily put an end to his existence? How then can we seek to gratify his mind at the expense of his soul? This is a thought peculiarly important for those who hear the Gospel faithfully administered: they are apt to forget that ministers are men of like passions with themselves; and that God particularly forbad that a novice should be admitted into the ministry, "lest being lifted up with pride, he should fall into the condemnation of the devil." Bear in mind, brethren, that flattery is an ordeal which few can bear[o]; and that he who makes use of it, "spreads a net for his brother's feet[p]."]

[g] Isai. xxxix. 3—7. with 2 Chron. xxxii. 25, 26.
[h] Hab. ii. 4. [i] Jam. iv. 6. Dan. iv. 37. [k] Prov. xvi. 5.
[l] Ezek. xi. 5. [m] 1 Cor. iv. 5. [n] Acts viii. 22.
[o] Prov. xxvii. 1. [p] Prov. xxix. 5.

OUTLINE NO. 1775

ELYMAS THE SORCERER STRUCK BLIND.

Acts xiii. 9—11. *Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season.*

IN general, the duty of ministers is to "have compassion on them that are ignorant and out of the way," and to "instruct in meekness them that oppose themselves:" but there are occasions whereon it is necessary for them to "rebuke men sharply," and with all authority. We do not indeed think that it would be proper for an uninspired minister to use exactly the language of our text, because he could not tell what measure of impiety existed in the mind of the person reproved: but, whether inspired or not inspired, it becomes every servant of God to make a firm stand against infidelity and impiety, and to declare without reserve the judgments of God against the enemies of his Gospel. St. Paul was certainly under no bad impression when he addressed Elymas; for, it is said, he was "filled with the Holy Ghost:" and under the influence of that same blessed Spirit we may speak with all boldness, and yet not violate, in any degree, the decorum or the charity which our office requires.

In the address before us, we notice,

I. The true character of the Gospel—

None of the inspired writers ever spoke in a doubting manner respecting the truth or excellence of the Gospel: convinced in their own minds, they uniformly spake with the decision that became them. St. Paul here calls the Gospel "the right ways of the Lord:" and this is indeed its proper character; for it contains the only right way,

1. Of seeking his favour—

[It offers salvation freely through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ — — — It requires nothing in those to whom it is offered, but an humble sense of their own guilt and misery, and an entire surrender of themselves to him, to be washed in his blood, and to be sanctified by his grace.

This is the "right way" of seeking favour with God. All the ways of man's devising are delusory. Not only is all hope of "establishing a righteousness of our own" vain, but even the smallest attempt to blend any thing of our own with his meritorious death and sacrifice will deceive us[a] — — — Salvation must be of grace, from first to last[b] — — —]

2. Of glorifying his name—

[The Gospel calls us to a life of universal holiness[c]; and requires us to "live, not unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us, and rose again[d]."

And this also is exclusively the "right way" of serving God. If we imagine that a barren unproductive faith will suffice, we shall find ourselves fatally mistaken. Nor will a partial obedience to God's will be accepted: his law, his whole law, must be written in our hearts, and exemplified in our lives. A wilful retaining of a single lust would prove as fatal to us, as a rejection of his Gospel altogether[e] — — —]

The attempts of Elymas to "pervert" the Gospel lead us to consider,

II. The opposition it meets with—

We are not now called to speak of persecution, but only of those arts which were used by this malignant sorcerer. We doubt not then but that he withstood the Apostles,

1. By subtle disputations—

[As a Jew, he would bring forward all the arguments he could against Christianity itself. And such opposers are still found amongst those who "name the name of Christ." There are infidels who deride Christianity as much as the most inveterate Jew could do. But where the Gospel is admitted as true, the fundamental doctrines of it are not uncommonly assailed with all the powers of reason. The total depravity of our nature, the truth and efficacy of Christ's atonement, the influences of the Holy Spirit, and the necessity of an entire surrender of ourselves to God, are all denied; and a religion little better than heathen morality is substituted in the place of that which Christ has revealed. He must be a stranger

[a] Rom. x. 3, 4. [b] Eph. ii. 8, 9. [c] Tit. ii. 11, 12.
[d] Rom. xiv. 7—9. [e] Matt. v. 29, 30.

indeed in our Jerusalem, who does not know how fiercely even the first principle of the Gospel, the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ, is decried———The sons of Jannes and Jambres, and of Alexander the coppersmith, are as subtle and malignant as their fathers were[f]———]

2. By base calumnies—

[We can have no doubt but that Elymas would endeavour to discredit the testimony of Paul and Barnabas by evil insinuations against their character and designs; nor would he fail to load their doctrine also with all the reproaches which Jewish malignity could suggest. And are not these weapons still used against the Gospel? Are not the preachers of it represented as "the troublers of Israel," as "deceivers," as "turning the world upside down?" Are they not often spoken of as crafty men, who in their hearts are adverse to the civil and ecclesiastical establishments of the land wherein they dwell? Is not their doctrine traduced precisely as in the days of old? St. Paul's complaint was, "We be slanderously reported, and some affirm that we say, Let us do evil that good may come:" and for the same complaint there is abundant occasion, wherever the Gospel is faithfully preached: nor can any better answer be made to our accusers than Paul himself made, namely, that "their damnation is just[g]." Indeed it is not possible for any one to embrace the truth in sincerity, without becoming an object for the envenomed shafts of slander: and it is worthy of observation, that, as this treatment is experienced by those *universally* who preach or profess the Gospel, so it is experienced by them *exclusively*: a man may preach or profess what else he will, and yet be at peace with the world: but the moment he becomes a decided follower of Christ, a warfare is commenced against him, even by his nearest relatives; yea "his greatest foes are generally those of his own household."]

In the Apostle's answer, however, we observe,

III. The evil and danger of opposing it—

The *evil* of it is marked *in the terms which the Apostle used*—

[We will grant that there was in Elymas a peculiar malignity of character, which justified the severity of St. Paul's address; and that the same severity would not be just, if used against many who oppose the Gospel: but still, in proportion as our character or conduct resembles that of Elymas, the terms in which he was addressed may be applied to us.

It is a fact, that the greater part of those who raise up opposition to the Gospel, are men of a subtle and mischievous

[f] 2 Tim. iii. 8. and iv. 14, 15. [g] Rom. iii. 8.

disposition: and it is equally true that they act under the immediate influence of Satan[h]. Now the great employment of Satan is to blind men's eyes, so that they may not see the Gospel; precisely as the great office of the Holy Spirit is, to open men's eyes, that they may behold it[i]: and, consequently, in doing Satan's work, they approve themselves his children[k]. And are they not in this enemies of all righteousness? Where is there any true righteousness to be found, but among those who embrace the Gospel? Look at the life of Christ and his Apostles, and see, if any thing like it ever was produced under the influence of false religion? It is a curious fact, that they who are most adverse to the principles of the Gospel, are always complaining that its friends are too strict, and too precise, and "righteous over-much;" and thus they shew themselves enemies no less to the holiness of the Gospel, than to its free and full salvation.

How great then must be the evil of a conduct which entails on men such epithets as these!]

The *danger* of it is marked *in the judgment he denounced*—

[God smóte this malicious adversary with blindness, agreeably to the declaration of St. Paul: and this blindness was an awful emblem of the blindness of his soul. We do not indeed expect that the enemies of the Gospel shall now receive such open demonstrations of God's displeasure; (though we are far from thinking that such judgments are never executed:) but we are sure that spiritual blindness is the common fruit of hostility to the Gospel; and that they who labour to blind others, can expect nothing but to be blinded themselves[l]. The blindness of Elymas was inflicted only "for a season," that he might repent, and "recover himself out of the snare of the devil, by whom he was led captive at his will:" and in like manner there is yet space given for repentance, even to the most inveterate opposers of the Gospel: but if they do not speedily acknowledge their guilt, they have reason to fear that ere long they will be given over to final impenitence, and their present blindness be succeeded by "the blackness of darkness for ever[m]."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are inquiring after truth—

[Of Sergius Paulus it is said, "He was a prudent man;" and "he called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God." Moreover, when he had heard it, he disregarded

[h] Eph. ii. 2. [i] 2 Cor. iv. 4, 6. [k] John viii. 44.
[l] Isai. vi. 9, 10. with Mark iv. 11, 12.
[m] Isai. xxviii. 22. and Jude, ver. 11, 13.

all the attempts of Elymas to pervert it, and himself became an avowed disciple of Christ. This was a conduct worthy of him, and worthy to be pursued by every wise and "*prudent*" man. We earnestly recommend it then to all to follow his example. *Be diligent in inquiring*, and avail yourselves of every opportunity of gaining instruction in the religion of Christ — — — *Be candid in judging*, and do not suffer yourselves to be prejudiced by the scoffs or calumnies of the unbelieving world — — — *Be firm* also *in acting:* do not be afraid of following the convictions of your own conscience; or think, that your being in a place of great power and authority will be any excuse for not obeying its voice: it is rather a reason why you should be the more bold for the Lord, because you may influence so many more by your example. Had this Roman governor put off his convictions, like Felix, he would probably have been left to perish in his sins: but now he enjoys, in all its richness, the truth he embraced. Know then, that ye likewise will soon receive the final recompence of your conduct; in happiness, if faithful to your convictions; but in misery inexpressible, if you dissemble with God.]

2. Those who are opposing it—

[Greatly is it to be regretted that the Gospel has still its adversaries, and that persons in authority are peculiarly beset with them. Satan knows how extensive is the influence of the great: and therefore he sends forth his emissaries to encompass them around, and to prejudice their minds against the faith of Christ. But be it known to all, that Christ will triumph at last, and that "his enemies ere long shall surely become his footstool." By some it may be thought a light matter to dispute against the Gospel, and to obstruct its influence on the minds of men: but our Lord has told us, that "it were better for us that a millstone should be put round our necks, and that we should be cast into the midst of the sea, than that we should offend one of his little ones." Let those then who will not embrace the Gospel, beware how they labour to pervert the faith of others: if they must perish, they had better perish alone, than under the guilt of destroying the souls of others. But let us hope, that those who have acted thus as Satan's instruments, will do so no more; but that rather their own eyes shall be opened, and that they will embrace the faith which they have endeavoured to destroy. If however any will persist in their impiety, let them tell us what are those ways which *they* call "right;" and let their principles be compared with those of the Apostle. We fear not the issue, if only this comparison be made: we have no doubt but that the Gospel alone contains the "*right* ways of the Lord," and that those only who embrace and walk in them will ever enter into life.]

OUTLINE NO. 1776

THE WORD OF SALVATION DELIVERED.

Acts xiii. 26. *Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.*

IN tracing the steps of the Apostle Paul, I see exactly what every minister of Christ should be: he should live but for one end, To save the souls of men: and, for the attainment of that end, he should account no labour too great, no sufferings too intense. He should live for it altogether, and, if need be, die for it also. Methinks I here see a minister addressing his stated congregation. He comes to them as an ambassador from God; bringing salvation, as it were, along with him, and declaring to every one of them, "To you, and to you, is the word of this salvation sent!"

Sustaining, through grace, this blessed office, I will now, in God's name,

I. Unfold to you the true character of the Gospel which we preach—

It is nothing more nor less than this, "The word of salvation." This admirably describes the Gospel; of which it may be truly said,

1. It reveals salvation clearly—

[No other book under heaven can tell us how a sinner may be saved———But this reveals to us the plan which God the Father devised, and God the Son executed, and God the Spirit applies to the souls of men. It opens to us all the wonders of redemption, through the incarnation and death of God's only dear Son. It sets him forth, as making an atonement for the sins of men, and as working out a righteousness wherein they may stand before God, and as imparting out of his own inexhaustible fulness whatsoever is necessary for every individual of mankind. All this it states with a clearness and precision which no man can mistake, unless Satan, the god of this word, has blinded his eyes.]

2. It offers salvation freely—

[It calls on no man to purchase salvation by any merits of his own; but offers it "freely to all, without money and without price[a]." The light of the sun is not more freely given than this, provided we be willing to accept it. We may see how free it was in its first offer to man in Paradise. Our first parents even fled from their Maker, instead of imploring mercy at his hands; and God followed them, and, without any solicitation on their part, promised them that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head[b]." Thus it is in every instance that occurs; "He is found of them who sought him not, and made known to them who inquired not after him[c]."]

3. It actually confers salvation on all who will receive the inspired declarations—

[The instant the word is received in faith, it becomes "effectual to turn you from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." The sins of him who receives it are "blotted out as a morning cloud," and his soul is "made a partaker of a divine nature:" he is also admitted into the number of God's children[d], and "his name is written in heaven." Say, brethren, whether this be not true? Say whether some of you, at least, cannot attest it by your own blessed experience? Then you see how justly that Gospel which we preach unto you is called "The word of salvation." There is no other word whereby any man can be saved: nor does any man *truly* receive this, without being saved by it. Hence, then, if you would understand it aright, and appreciate it aright, you must view it in this light, and receive it for the end for which alone it is revealed.]

Having stated the true nature of the Gospel, I now proceed to,

II. Execute the commission which we bear in relation to it—

St. Paul had a mixed audience of Jews and Gentiles. The former he addressed as "the stock of Abraham;" the latter he included under those who "fear God[e]." Now, though we have not exactly the same description of persons here, we have others who very nearly correspond with them; whom, therefore, we will distinctly address.

1. Those who, on account of their attachment to the law, may be supposed *not to need* the Gospel salvation—

[a] Isai. lv. 1. [b] Gen. iii. 15. [c] Isai. lxv. 1. [d] John i. 12.
[e] Compare the text with ver. 42. and with Acts x. 35.

[There doubtless are here many moral, and, in a qualified sense, religious persons, who think by their own repentance and good works to save themselves. But, beloved, the very best of you are sinners, and stand in need of mercy at the hands of God; as well as of a new nature, which God alone can create within you. "Your Father Abraham had this Gospel preached to him[f]:" Moses also preached it, both in the ceremonial and moral law[g]——— And if the Apostle Paul, who was, "touching the righteousness of the law, blameless," was constrained to "renounce all hope in his own righteousness, that he might be clothed in the righteousness of Christ[h]," so must you do: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified——— "To you, then, is the word of this salvation sent;" and if you accept it as God's word to you, it shall prove "the power of God to the salvation of your souls."]

2. Those who, through their alienation from God and his law, may be supposed to be *beyond the reach of* salvation—

[Dear brethren, there is no limit, either to the mercy of God, or to the efficacy of his Gospel. "The blood of Jesus Christ, sprinkled on the soul, cleanseth from all sin:" "nor shall any one who comes to God in his name ever be cast out" ——— Remember, then, that to you, even to every one of you, however far you may have gone from God, is "the word of salvation now sent:" nor is there one of you that shall ever perish, if only you truly and cordially embrace it.]

Behold now the effect of proclaiming this word, in the case of the Apostle Paul:

1. Some desired to hear more of it—

[They desired that "the same words might be preached to them again the next Sabbath," and on the intervening days before it[i]. Let it have the same effect upon you, my brethren; and suffer no means of instruction henceforth to pass away unimproved———]

2. Others, on the other hand, "contradicted and blasphemed" the word[k]—

[So you must expect to find it at this day. But be not stumbled at it. If, when delivered by the Apostle Paul, and by our blessed Saviour himself, the Gospel was in many cases rejected, wonder not if it be so when delivered by us. But shall the unbelief of some make the faith of God of none

[f] Gal. iii. 8. [g] Heb. x. 1. Rom. x. 4. Gal. iii. 24.
[h] Phil. iii. 9. [i] See ver. 42. The Greek. [k] ver. 45.

effect? God forbid. "Let God be true, but every man a liar[l]"———]

3. Others were effectually saved by it—

[Yes, some "glorified the word of life; and, having been ordained to eternal life, believed it[m]," and were saved by it. Thus let it be glorified by you. It is worthy of all your submission, and all your trust, and all your confidence: and if you will "glorify it" by faith and obedience, it shall surely "glorify you" with everlasting life[n]———From this moment, therefore, let nothing divert you from it, but "*continue steadfastly in the grace of God*[o]."]

[l] Rom. iii. 3, 4. [m] ver. 48. [n] 2 Thess. iii. 1. [o] ver. 43.

OUTLINE NO. 1777

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST GLAD TIDINGS

Acts xiii. 32, 33. *We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second Psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.*

THE resurrection of Christ was the foundation whereon the whole edifice of our religion was built. To that Jesus himself directed his Disciples to look forward as the evidence of his Messiahship; and, after he had risen, he appeared to them repeatedly for the space of forty days, that they might be enabled to testify of it with the fullest assurance. A select number were chosen by him for the very purpose of bearing witness to this wonderful event: and because St. Paul had not enjoyed the same advantage as the other Apostles, he was favoured with a vision of his Lord long after his removal from the sight of all other mortals, in order that he, as well as the others, might be able to testify of it from ocular demonstration.

In the words before us he speaks of Christ's resurrection,

I. As an accomplishment of prophecy—

The passage quoted by the Apostle is very properly applied to this subject—

[The Psalms were in the Apostle's days arranged in the same order as they now stand. And the scope of the second Psalm is to declare the triumph of Jesus over all his enemies by means of his resurrection from the grave, and of his consequent exaltation to the right hand of God. And he might well be said to be "begotten" in the day of his resurrection, because he was then formed anew, as it were, from the earth.]

It is confirmed also by many other passages that predict the same truth—

[As it was fore-ordained by God, so it was foretold in a variety of ways. Sometimes it was exhibited in types[a], and sometimes in prophecies[b]. In one Scripture, not quoted indeed in this place, but cited no less than six times in the New Testament, this marvellous event was predicted in terms so plain that none could misunderstand it, who did not obstinately shut their eyes against the truth[c].]

We must not however suppose this to be an uninteresting fact: for the Apostle further speaks of it,

II. As glad tidings to the soul—

To the disconsolate Disciples the tidings of Christ's resurrection were doubtless exceeding joyful. But they ought to be no less so to us, since that event ascertains,

1. The virtue of his sacrifice—

[Had he not risen, his death had been in vain[d]. We could nave had no evidence that our debt was discharged, if our Surety had not been liberated from the prison of the grave. But his resurrection clearly proved that he had satisfied the demands of law and justice, and it thereby affords us a ground of assured hope, and triumphant exultation[e].]

2. The sufficiency of his power—

[a] Isaac, being put to death, as it were, by his own father, was *received again from the dead* in a figure, Heb. xi. 19. Jonah was raised again on the third day from the belly of a fish, Matt. xii. 39, 40. The living bird that was let loose after having been dipped in the blood of the bird that had been slain, represented Jesus as ascending to heaven with his own blood, Lev. xiv. 51, 53. with Heb. ix. 12.

[b] ver. 34, 35. with Isai. lv. 3. which certainly must include the resurrection of him that was to be "the leader and commander;" and Ps. xvi. 10. which is so largely commented upon by St. Peter, Acts ii. 25—31.

[c] Ps. cxviii. 22. with Luke xx. 17. [d] 1 Cor. xv. 14, 17, 18.

[e] Rom. iv. 25. and viii. 34.

[If he were still dead, it would be in vain to look to him for help. But, when he has raised up himself[f], and spoiled all the principalities and powers of hell[g], and been exalted on purpose that he might be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins[h], what may we not expect at his hands? Surely he is declared thereby to be the Son of God with power[i], and to be able to save us to the uttermost[k]. Let us only seek to know him in the power of his resurrection[l], and nothing shall be impossible unto us[m].]

3. The certainty of our own resurrection to dwell with him—

[Our resurrection depended altogether upon his: if he had not risen, neither should we have risen: but because he rose, we shall rise also. Christ is the first-fruits, which, while it sanctified, assured also, the whole harvest[n]. He is our forerunner, who is gone to heaven to prepare places for us, and will come again to raise us to the possession of them[o]. We therefore may consider death and the grave as vanquished for us, and look forward to the complete triumph which we ourselves shall have over them in the last day[p]. Because he liveth, we may be sure that we shall live also[q].]

As a further IMPROVEMENT of this passage, permit me to observe,

1. How deeply are we interested in the writings of the Old Testament!

[In them are promises of which we receive the accomplishment. The word of God is not of private interpretation[r], as though it belonged only to this or that individual. Many parts doubtless had a *peculiar* reference to those to whom they were spoken; but none an *exclusive* reference. Let us then embrace the promises as spoken to ourselves[s], and expect the fulfilment of them to our own souls.]

2. How thankful should we be for a preached Gospel!

[Many, when the Gospel is preached to them, are ready to exclaim, "We beseech thee, torment us not[t]." Yes, they look on faithful ministers as "the troublers of Israel[u]." But

[f] John x. 17, 18. [g] Col. ii. 15. [h] Acts v. 31.
[i] Rom. i. 4. [k] Heb. vii. 25. [l] Phil. iii. 10.
[m] Mark ix. 23. [n] 1 Cor. xv. 20.
[o] Heb. vi. 20. John xiv. 2, 3. [p] 1 Cor. xv. 53—55.
[q] John xiv. 19. [r] 2 Pet. i. 20.
[s] Compare Josh. i. 5. with Heb. xiii. 5, 6.
[t] Matt. viii. 29. and Luke viii. 28. [u] 1 Kings xviii. 17.

the scope of our ministry is to "*declare glad tidings*," even to proclaim a crucified, and an exalted Saviour. Let any one contemplate the foregoing subject, and see whether it do not afford matter for rejoicing ——— Let men only forsake their sins, and we have not a word to utter which will not administer to them an occasion of joy. In this light the resurrection of our Lord was viewed by the first Disciples. And are not they "our fathers, and we their children?" Yes; we are all of one family, all united to one Head[x], and all heirs of the same glory: and, if we only cleave to the Saviour as they did, we may confidently expect the blessings which they enjoyed, and may look forward with joy to that time, when we shall sit down with all the patriarchs and prophets in the kingdom of our God for ever[y].]

[x] Eph. i. 10. Heb. xii. 23. [y] Matt. viii. 11. Luke xiii. 28

OUTLINE NO. 1778

THE SURE MERCIES OF DAVID.

Acts xiii. 34. *As concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.*

IT is of the nature of prophecy to be dark. It was doubtless given in order to raise in men an expectation of future events; but it was not designed to declare them so fully, as to induce men to exert themselves either for the effectuating or counteracting of the things foretold. Its true use was, to shew, that God had both foreseen and fore-ordained all that should come to pass; and to convince us, that nothing can occur, but according to his determinate counsel and will. The passage cited in my text is strongly illustrative of this truth. One would not readily have imagined that so sublime a mystery as that of our Saviour's resurrection had been contained in these words: but, now that we see them accomplished, we can have no doubt but that they were intended to predict that great event; since an inspired Apostle so explains them, and builds upon his explanation the most important of all truths, the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus.

To place the text in its true light, I will consider,

I. The fact asserted—

[This was, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; the most important of all events; since, without it, neither the incarnation nor death of Christ would have been of any avail[a]. To this our blessed Lord continually referred, as the most convincing proof of his Messiahship[b] — — — For the more full discovery of this, he abode on earth forty days after his resurrection; "shewing, by many infallible proofs," that he was indeed "risen, according to the Scriptures[c]." And to this event all his Apostles bare witness, as establishing, beyond all doubt or question, his divine mission. This was the point to be settled for the conviction of all, whether Jews or Gentiles: and this once clearly established, all the rest followed as a matter of course, that could not be questioned by any child of man[d].]

But let me direct your attention to,

II. The prophecy appealed to in confirmation of it—

This, we have said, was dark: but, when duly explained, it carries full conviction along with it.

To this event, beyond all doubt, the prophecy referred—

[With his people God entered into covenant, to "give them the sure mercies of David." What these were, the Psalmist fully informs us. They were, in the first place, to establish on his throne his Promised Seed, the Messiah; and then to give to all the subjects of the Messiah's kingdom the full blessings of salvation[e] — — — But Messiah was to suffer[f] — — — How, then, could this prophecy be fulfilled? — — —]

By this event, the prophecy was fulfilled—

[Christ, being raised from the dead, was empowered to carry on his work; as the high-priest did, when, after offering his sacrifice, he entered into the holy of holies. Now, too, he was seated on his throne[g]; and all which had been engaged in covenant both to him and to his people, was put into a train of progressive and ultimate accomplishment. Thus were the mercies, which David had *long since contemplated as "sure*[h]," rendered "sure" to Christ and to all his believing people — — — Not only was God's word verified by this; but *a pledge was given*, that it should be fulfilled in every the

[a] 1 Cor. xv. 14—18. [b] John ii. 19. Matt. xii. 38—40. and xx. 19.
[c] Acts i. 3. [d] Rom. i. 4.
[e] *Cite*, at full length, Ps. lxxxix. 19—36. [f] Isai. liii. 1—12.
[g] Ps. ii. 6. [h] 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

minutest particular, to all who should rely upon it in deed and in truth.]

And now let me call your attention to,

III. The conclusion drawn—

The same train of argument had been followed both by St. Peter and St. Paul. And from it their inferences were,

1. That Christ was indeed the true Messiah—

[See the argument as stated by St. Peter on the day of Pentecost[i] — — — Then mark his conclusion drawn: "THEREFORE, let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ[k]." Know ye then this, my beloved brethren: there is a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; and there is no other than He. He has died for you; and his sacrifice has been accepted of the Father in your behalf. And of this you have a certain pledge, in his resurrection from the dead. I call upon you, then, to renounce every other hope; and to look unto Him, as "all your salvation and all your desire" — — —]

2. That all who believe in him shall most assuredly be saved—

[This is the conclusion, as drawn by the Apostle Paul. Having further prosecuted the line of argument which we have already noticed[l], he adds, "Be it known unto you, THEREFORE, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses[m]." Yes; to every one of you do I this day preach the forgiveness of sins. Who amongst you does not need it? Who amongst you can obtain remission in any other way? Who amongst you would not account the pardon of all his sins as the richest blessing that could be conferred upon him? Behold, then, I this day offer it to every one amongst you: yea, I offer it simply by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Under the Mosaic law there were many sins for which no sacrifice was appointed. But not so under the Christian dispensation. There is no sin, whatever, nor any accumulation of sins, which may not be washed away by the Redeemer's blood: for "the blood of Jesus Christ," we are told, "cleanseth from all sin[n]." To every one of you, therefore, do I offer, in his name, a free and full remission, in perfect accordance with God's covenant,

[i] Acts ii. 22—35. [k] Acts ii. 36. [l] ver. 35—37.
[m] ver. 38, 39. [n] 1 John i. 7.

ratified as it has been by the Redeemer's blood, and confirmed as it is by his predicted resurrection and his glorious ascension.]

BEHOLD, then, *how certain are God's promises to those who rely upon them!*

[If any promise could have failed, methinks it was that which related to the exaltation of the Messiah. See him dying on the cross, and sealed up in the grave: what is now become of all God's promised mercies? Wait but a little, and they shall be acknowledged to be sure and certain. So your case, brethren, may appear as desperate as his: yet, in the appointed hour, shall you surmount your every difficulty, and be glorified with your Messiah at the right hand of God — — —]

OUTLINE NO. 1779

DANGER OF DESPISING THE GOSPEL SALVATION.

Acts xiii. 38—41. *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.*

NO one can read the New Testament with attention, without seeing that there is one point to which all the discourses of the Apostles tend, namely, the exhibition of Christ as the Saviour of the world. In Him all the lines meet, as in their common centre. The discourses of St. Paul embraced the whole circle of divine truth; yet he justly says, that "he determined to know nothing among his converts but Jesus Christ, and him crucified." In the chapter before us is contained his address to the Jews in a synagogue at Antioch. He begins with a subject ever gratifying to a Jewish ear, a rehearsal of the distinguished mercies vouchsafed to that nation from the time of their departure out of Egypt to the time of David, from whose seed they all acknowledged that their Messiah should spring. He then declares, that that Messiah was come, even Jesus, in whom the prophecies had been literally fulfilled, both in the peculiar

manner of his death, and in his resurrection from the dead. He then comes to apply the subject to their hearts and consciences, combining all the tenderness of a brother with all the fidelity of an Apostle. In opening to you that part which we have just read, we shall notice,

I. The declaration made—

It had been said by our Lord after his resurrection, that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations[a]." And here St. Paul, executing his commission, declares that this way of salvation was,

1. Divinely appointed—

[There is no doubt or hesitation to be seen in his mode of expressing this truth: on the contrary, he speaks with most assured confidence; "Be it known to you, brethren, that through this man is the forgiveness of sins:" Be it known, that his death was a propitiation for sin,—that by that sacrifice, Divine justice has been satisfied,—that through it God is reconciled to a guilty world,—and that he has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation, and sent us on purpose to preach to you the forgiveness of your sins in his name[b]. These are truths of infinite importance to every child of man: and we declare them without even a shadow of doubt upon our own minds; and desire that they may be embraced by you with the fullest assurance of your minds, and the liveliest gratitude of your souls[c].

Beloved brethren, we announce the same glorious truths to you. Who amongst you is not a sinner before God? Who does not need such a Saviour? Who has not reason to leap for joy at having such a method of forgiveness proposed to him? Know ye then, that "to *you* is the word of this salvation sent[d];" and "we, as God's ambassadors, pray you in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God[e]."]

2. Universally effectual—

[There is no distinction now made between Jews and Gentiles: the word is no longer confined to one age or country; "it is gone forth unto the ends of the world." Nor is there now any distinction of sins, as far as relates to the forgiveness of them through the blood of Christ. Under the law, there were many sins for which no sacrifice whatever could be accepted. The adulterer and the murderer, for instance, were

[a] Luke xxiv. 47. [b] 2 Cor. v. 18, 19. [c] 1 Tim. i. 15.
[d] ver. 26. [e] 2 Cor. v. 20.

left without any means of pardon provided for them by the law: nor was any presumptuous sin to be reckoned among those for which sacrifices were appointed[f]. But under the Gospel there is no exception whatever: "All manner of sin shall be forgiven unto men," provided they repent of it, and believe in Jesus Christ for the remission of it: and, if the sin against the Holy Ghost be excepted, it is not because the blood of Christ would not cleanse from that, as well as from every other, but because the man who has committed it must have arrived at such a degree of blindness and obduracy, that he never will repent of his iniquity, nor ever look to Christ with sincerity of heart for the remission of it. We confidently declare, that sins even of a scarlet or crimson dye shall be forgiven[g]; yea, we declare that every sin we have ever committed *is* actually forgiven, the very instant we truly believe in Christ: even "the little children in Christ" may glory in this, as a truth on which they may most confidently rely, that on their believing in Christ, they not only *shall be*, but actually, as our text expresses it, "*are* justified from all things[h]."]

To impress this blessed truth the more deeply on your minds, let us consider,

II. The admonition with which it is enforced—

Glorious as this salvation is, it is too generally despised—

[All the prophets prophesied respecting it with more or less clearness[i]: but all had reason to complain, "Who hath believed our report[k]?" In the days of the Apostles the same complaint was made[l]: and it may but too justly be repeated by us at this day. If this be doubted, let any man tell us, where "has the offence of the cross ceased?" Where is not the faithful exhibition of a crucified Saviour derided as enthusiasm? and in what place are not the followers of Christ gazed upon "as signs and wonders?" — — — But it is not the infidel only or the scoffer that despises Christ: for every man is guilty of despising him, who complies not with the invitations of his Gospel, and withholds from him the affections of his heart. O let us examine ourselves carefully on this head, and see whether the warning in our text may not justly be applied to us — — —]

If we be found among the number of his despisers, woe be to us—

[f] Numb. xv. 30. with ver. 39. of the text.
[g] Isai. i. 18. Ps. li. 7. [h] Col. ii. 13. 1 John ii. 12.
[i] Acts x. 43. [k] Isai. liii. 1. [l] Rom. x. 16.

[The Jews of old despised both the mercies and the judgments of their God: and the Prophet Habakkuk, expostulating with them, declared, that God would inflict on them such judgments by the hands of the Chaldeans, as they would not credit, however strongly his determination should be announced[m]. St. Paul declares, that similar judgments awaited the Jews of his day; and warns them against bringing on themselves such heavy calamities[n]. But what are the calamities inflicted by the Chaldeans or Romans in comparison of those which await unbelievers in the eternal world? We declare to men, that God has wrought the most stupendous work of mercy in the redemption of the world by his dear Son, and that he will consign over to everlasting misery all who reject his Gospel: but men will not believe either the one or the other of these things: they will not so believe his promises as to seek an interest in them; nor will they so believe his threatenings as to endeavour to escape them. But as the judgments denounced against the Jews in former ages have come upon them, so will the judgments denounced against us. Methinks it were sufficient to hear God so strongly assert this, as he does in many places[o]: but God condescends to appeal to us, and to make us judges in our own cause: "What shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of Christ?" "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?" Can we hear such appeals, and not see the need of attending to the admonition in the text? O let us "*beware*," how we reject or slight the salvation now offered us. Let us "*beware*" lest we bring upon ourselves that "wrath and fiery indignation which await the adversaries" of the Lord Jesus: and what I say unto one, I say unto all, "Beware."]

[m] Hab. i. 5.

[n] St. Paul quotes the Septuagint translation, which differs a little, but not materially, from the original Hebrew.

[o] Mark xvi. 16. John iii. 36.

OUTLINE NO. 1780

THE GENTILES RECEIVE THE GOSPEL.

Acts xiii. 46—48. *Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the*

Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

WHEREVER the word of God has been faithfully dispensed, it has created a diversity of sentiment amongst the hearers; some receiving it with gratitude, and others rejecting it with disdain. Even when our Lord himself preached, "some said he was a good man; whilst others said, Nay, but he deceiveth the people." Such also was the reception which the Gospel met with when ministered by the Apostles: "The multitude was divided; and part held with the Jews, and part with the Apostles[a]." Our blessed Lord foretold this, and declared, that the effect of his Gospel would be, "not to bring peace on earth, but a sword;" and "to set even the nearest relatives against each other[b]." The division occasioned by it at Antioch was exceeding great; the Jews, almost universally, "rejecting it," whilst the Gentiles, in vast multitudes, took the liveliest interest in it; insomuch that the Apostle now for the first time made the instruction and conversion of the Gentiles the great object of his ministrations.

In the words which we have now read, we see,

I. The necessity to which he was reduced—

[The obstinacy of the Jews was attended with the most distressing consequences. They, in the first instance, *disregarded* the Gospel; but, "when they saw almost the whole city come together to hear it," they *set themselves against* it, with the utmost violence, "contradicting" it as false, and "blaspheming" it as wicked. With such inveteracy did they put it away from them, that they *pronounced sentence*, as it were, *against themselves*[c], as altogether unworthy of eternal life. On this account, the Apostles, without any further delay, put into execution the commission they had received, and made a free offer to the Gentiles of the blessings which were thus despised by the Jews.

[a] Acts xiv. 4. [b] Matt. x. 34—36.
[c] This is the meaning of κρίνετε ἑαυτούς.

Now it is a fact which cannot be dissembled, that circumstances not very dissimilar are found, wherever a man of an apostolic spirit is called to labour: multitudes of those to whom he has been primarily and more particularly sent, not only despise his message, but, when others in the neighbourhood flock to hear his word, "are filled with envy," and complain of the inconvenience they sustain by having their churches so crowded. They also "contradict and blaspheme" both the testimony that is borne, and the minister who bears it. Thus in effect they "put away the word of God from them," and declare, by their conduct, that they neither value nor desire that salvation, which Christ has purchased for them. Thus, with the most earnest desire to promote the salvation of those whom he regards as his immediate charge, a minister is often constrained, by the obstinacy of those who will not hear, to be content with addressing himself to those who will; and to regard those as the most endeared objects of his attention, who are not, except by their own voluntary act, contained within the proper sphere of his commission. This is greatly to be regretted, because such despisers of the Gospel both harden themselves, and excite prejudice in others: nevertheless it is a comfort to the faithful minister to find, that, if rejected by some, there are others who hear him gladly, and know how to appreciate his labours.]

In turning to the Gentiles, he declared,

II. The authority under which he acted—

[He might have mentioned the express injunctions of his Lord[d]: but he knew that his word would have no weight with the Jews; and therefore he cited a passage of the Old Testament, which the Jews themselves understood as referring to the Messiah[e]. The passage he has quoted contains a promise of the Father to the Son, that he should not have the Jews only for a portion, but should be set for light and salvation to the ends of the earth.

Under this authority we now speak: and under this warrant we offer salvation to every child of man. Behold then, Christ is given for *a light* to the whole world; and all of you who "sit in darkness and the shadow of death" may "come to the brightness of his rising." He is given also "for *salvation*" to the ends of the earth: and every one who is sensible of his lost estate, may "be saved from wrath through him"——— He is God's salvation; provided by him, qualified by him, upheld by him, accepted by him: and every sinner in the universe is not only authorized to trust in him, but is commanded so to do; and is assured by God himself that he

[d] Luke xxiv. 47. Acts i. 8. [e] Isai. xlix. 6.

shall never be ashamed of his hope — — — This we are commissioned to declare: and if ten thousand bigoted or self-righteous people should reject it with disdain, we trust that we shall never want some contrite auditors, who shall receive it with gratitude and joy.]

In the sequel, we are informed of,

III. The success he obtained—

[The self-condemned Gentiles heard these tidings with joy; and vast multitudes of them "glorified the word of the Lord," receiving it as "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation." On some indeed the effect was only transient; but as many as were appointed to, and disposed for, eternal life, believed[f]: they "received the word into an honest and good heart," and "brought forth fruit unto perfection."

This is the effect which we hope to see produced in our ministrations. Despisers we expect to meet with, but we expect to find also many in whom our word shall be the power of God unto salvation. Who then amongst you has his heart, like Lydia's, "opened by the Lord?" Who amongst you feels the attractions of God's love, and the constraining influences of his grace? You, we trust, will be the better for the message we deliver: you will become the followers of Christ: you will embrace him, and honour him, and "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart"— — —]

In the passage we have been considering are two opposite characters, whom it will now be proper to ADDRESS:

1. Those who reject the Gospel—

[Such characters exist as much among those who call themselves Christians, as among the Jews themselves. Think then what you do: "you judge yourselves," that is, you pass sentence on yourselves as "unworthy of everlasting life." Your want of humility betrays your total unfitness for heaven, or even for the offer of the Gospel salvation. Your contempt of the most stupendous effort of God's love that ever men or angels beheld, betrays the same. If you look into the Scripture, you cannot find any resemblance between yourselves and the saints of old: and, if you could go up to heaven, you would not find one of your spirit there. Are you then willing to continue in a state, wherein your whole spirit and conduct declares that you are daily ripening for destruction? O think

[f] The precise idea contained in the word τασσω is that of a General marshalling his army, and assigning to every one the post he shall occupy, and the work he shall perform. Believers are thus called and appointed of God.

of it whilst yet your errors may be rectified, and your iniquities forgiven.]

2. Those who are made willing to embrace it—

[Think who it is that has disposed your minds to the attainment of everlasting life: and give him the glory due unto his name. It is God alone that "hath made you to differ" from the unbelieving world; and therefore to him alone must be all the praise. Now then, if you really profess to have experienced the grace of God, we call upon you to "glorify his word:" shew that you believe it to be true: let it be seen that you love it, and trust in it, and obey it; and that you "esteem it more than your necessary food." Attend the ministration of it as the Gentiles did, not with vain curiosity, but with the deepest reverence and most lively gratitude. Hear it as the word of God to your souls: hear it as glad tidings of great joy; and let every succeeding Sabbath bring you into a closer acquaintance with it, and a more entire conformity to its dictates. Above all things, attend to what it says of Christ; and receive him as your all-sufficient light, and your complete salvation.]

OUTLINE NO. 1781

TRIBULATION THE WAY TO HEAVEN.

Acts xiv. 22. *We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*

REAL fortitude is shewn, not more in overcoming difficulties which unexpectedly occur, than in encountering firmly those which are foreseen. In order to meet trials aright, we must be armed with a heavenly principle: and hence arises the need of a fixed principle in the heart of a Christian; since he is assured, that he shall have many enemies to conflict with, and that his way to heaven lies through much tribulation. This is declared to us by an inspired Apostle; who himself experienced the truth of it, and has forewarned us to expect that it shall also be fulfilled in us.

Let us consider his testimony,

I. As confirmed in him—

The whole life of the Apostle, after he embraced

the faith of Christ, was an illustration and proof of this truth. View him—

1. On this occasion—

[If ever he might have hoped to escape persecution, it was at this time. Consider what he had done in restoring a man who had been a cripple from the womb; and what a spirit the people had manifested towards him, in ascribing to him divine honour, and bringing sacrifices to him as unto a god: Could it be thought that he was in any danger at that place? Yet, behold, no sooner did Jews come from Antioch and Iconium to stir up the people against him, than their minds were changed, and they stoned him as an impostor, whom they had just before proposed to worship as a god: so rapid was the transition from one extreme to another. Just as, in the case of our blessed Lord, there was but an interval of three days between the acclamations of the populace, and the universal cry of "Crucify him, crucify him," so there was but a step between the deification and destruction of this blessed man.]

2. Through the whole course of his ministry—

[Like his adorable Master, the Lord Jesus, he was truly "a man of sorrows." Indeed he expected that he should be so, and forewarned his converts respecting it, lest, when they saw the treatment he received, they should be discouraged[a]. When speaking of his sufferings some years afterwards, he especially referred to this particular occasion[b]: but, in fact, it made only a single article out of a long catalogue of trials, which attended him through life[c].]

We are apt to think that persecution was the lot of Christians only in the first ages of the Church: but the Apostle's testimony relates to all Christians of every age; and must therefore be considered,

II. As to be realized in us—

It is a fact that all zealous Christians are persecuted—

[We say not that persecution rages equally at all times; but we affirm, that lively and zealous Christians are hated by the world[d]: that "those who are born after the flesh do still persecute those who are born after the Spirit[e]." There are seasons indeed when the world may seem to favour a servant of God; but, in the midst of all their seeming kindness, there

[a] 1 Thess. iii. 3, 4. [b] 2 Tim. iii. 10, 11. [c] 2 Cor. xi. 23—28.
[d] Matt. x. 22. John xv. 18, 19. [e] Gal. iv. 29.

is in their hearts a rooted enmity against him, which, like sediment in clear water, will shew itself, the very instant it is stirred. It needs but little to inflame a whole community against him. They can hear unkind reports respecting others and disregard them; but in every thing that leads to the disadvantage of a child of God, they take an interest; and, like inflammable matter, easily communicate the malignant fire to each other, so as rapidly to produce a general conflagration[f]. And hence every believer is fore-warned to expect persecution as his proper and certain lot[g].]

And God has graciously ordained, that trials shall attend us for our good—

[Our blessed Lord "learned obedience by the things that he suffered," and "was made perfect by sufferings:" and we are to be conformed to him in these respects: we must "suffer with him, in order that we may be glorified together[h]. There is in us a great deal of "dross and tin," which, in the furnace of affliction, must be purged away[i]. Our graces also must be exercised and confirmed by means of trials, which are altogether necessary to call them forth[k]: and to the graces so exercised will our eternal weight of glory be proportioned[l].]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who are the friends of this world—

[This is a state, which, though greatly desired by men in general, is not by any means to be coveted; for it proves infallibly that we are not faithful to our God[m]. It is not possible for light and darkness to coalesce, or for Christ and Belial to agree together[n]. It were better far to be hated of all men for the Lord's sake, than to incur his displeasure for the sake of retaining their good opinion.]

2. Those who suffer for the Lord's sake—

[Be not surprised at any thing that you suffer[o], nor be grieved at it. The inspired writers speak of your trials as a just occasion of joy[p]. Only endeavour to improve them aright[q]; and you will never complain of the difficulties of the way, when you have reached your journey's end[r].]

[f] Ps. lvii. 4. and lxiv. 3—6.
[g] 2 Tim. iii. 12.
[h] 1 Pet. ii. 21. Rom. viii. 17, 29.
[i] Isai. i. 25.
[k] Rom. v. 3, 4.
[l] 2 Cor. iv. 17.
[m] Jam. iv. 4.
[n] 2 Cor vi. 15, 16.
[o] 1 Pet. iv. 12—16.
[p] Jam. i. 2, 3, 12.
[q] 1 Cor. iv. 9—13.
[r] Rom. vii. 14.

OUTLINE NO. 1782

SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL A GROUND OF JOY.

Acts xiv. 27. *And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.*

A VERY distinguishing feature of primitive Christianity was, that, whilst it filled all its votaries with an anxiety for their own souls, it inspired them also with a love to the souls of others, and with a zeal for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom through the world. True it is, indeed, that, on the occasion before us, the separating of Paul and Barnabas to the work of preaching to the Gentiles originated, not with the people of Antioch, but with God himself, who gave a special command respecting it[a]. Yet it is evident, that the whole Church took a lively interest in it; and came together afterwards, with great delight, to hear all that had occurred during this benevolent, but arduous, excursion.

Through the tender mercy of our God, somewhat of a similar spirit has arisen in our day: so that I can scarcely enter on a more gratifying subject with you, than to shew,

I. The interest which the primitive Church took in the work of God—

The people expressed no reluctance at parting with Paul and Barnabas—

[We cannot doubt but that the ministry of these two men at Antioch was most beneficial to the people's souls: yet we read of no reluctance on the part of the Church in surrendering up their own personal benefit for the good of others. They resembled the Apostle Paul, who, in all such cases, "sought not his own profit, but the profit of many, that they might be saved[b]." — — —]

Nor did the Apostles manifest any backwardness to undertake this dangerous enterprise—

[a] Acts xiii. 2—4. [b] 1 Cor. x. 33.

[We can have no doubt, but that, however much they might delight in their stated labours amongst a people united to them in the bonds of Christian love, they gladly addressed themselves to the work assigned them, where they would find little but incessant labour, amidst the fiercest opposition. And from their perseverance in it under such circumstances, and from the pleasure which they expressed afterwards in recording all the dealings of God with them, and the happy effects of their ministrations, it is clear that one feeling pervaded the whole body; and that all, both ministers and people, found their chief happiness in the service of their God. Nor can we doubt but that they all rejoiced in the sacrifices they had made, when they saw what benefits had resulted from them to the Gentile world. They had fasted and prayed when these two Apostles were separated to their work: and, that they abounded in praises and thanksgivings after their return, we may be well assured.]

Such being the habit of Christians in the first age, let us consider,

II. The instruction to be derived from it—

We are well aware, that the call of men to special labours, in this day, is not by any means so clear and determinate as in the case before us: nor do we intend to place any events of the present time on a footing with those which took place, under the particular direction of heaven, in the apostolic age. Yet, from the dispositions evinced by the primitive Church, we may clearly see,

1. That the work of God is confessedly the greatest of all concerns—

[What is there that can be compared with it? The government of kingdoms is little in comparison. The rise and fall of the four great empires would scarcely have been deemed worthy of notice, but for the influence they had in introducing the Messiah's kingdom, which was to supersede and survive them all. It is the establishment of this kingdom which God has had in view, from before the foundation of the world. All his eternal counsels have had respect to it: all his dispensations towards the whole world have been ordered in subserviency to it: all his perfections are displayed in it, and all his purposes completed: and every one that labours for the advancement of it is "a worker together with God." The first archangel in heaven cannot find a more honourable employment than that of helping forward God's designs in reference to it: much

more, therefore, may man account it the only object worthy of his pursuit.]

2. That it is an object for which we all, according to our ability, should labour—

[The advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom is not the work of ministers only, but of the people also. It can scarcely be credited, how much an efficient ministry is aided by the co-operation of private Christians, in all the different works and labours of love. Many will listen to them, who would regard the admonition of pastors as a mere official ceremony, or an impertinent intrusion. Indeed, it is not possible for ministers to do every thing: even a Moses required seventy elders to assist him: and, at this day, it is only by the united exertions of many, that the work of God in general, and that of missions in particular, can be carried forward. Nor let it be imagined that the poor are incapable of affording aid to the common cause: for they, if they cannot assist materially either by intellectual efforts or pecuniary contributions, may, by their prayers for the Divine blessing, effect more than the whole world combined could by their own personal exertions.]

3. That the success of it should be to us a source of the sublimest joy—

[With what raised expectations did the Church of Antioch meet together; and with what joy did they hear that "God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles!" Methinks the whole assembly lost, for the time, all thought of their own personal welfare, being swallowed up with the delightful contemplation of the welfare of others. Surely, with one heart and one voice they glorified God for the mercy he had vouchsafed to a sinful and idolatrous world. And should not a similar feeling pervade us Gentiles, in relation to the Jews, if there be any awakening amongst them? Truly, if there be, as in Ezekiel's vision, any stir among "the dry bones," whether they be those of Jews or Gentiles, or of persons bearing the Christian name, it should fill our souls with gratitude, and our lips with praise — — —]

Let us now IMPROVE this subject,

1. In a way of inquiry—

[What is the state of God's work amongst *you?* "The door of faith," as you well know, "has been long opened to you." Have you *entered in?* or, are you yet but on the threshold, or perhaps yet standing afar off? Think with yourselves: have you truly come to Christ, and believed in Christ as the only Saviour of your souls? — — — And, supposing you to have entered the vestibule of God's temple, have you

advanced into the sanctuary? We read of those "whose faith and love grew exceedingly;" and so should yours grow: nor should you ever cease to press forward, till you are come into the holy of holies, even into the immediate presence of your God — — —]

2. In a way of information—

[God's work, I trust, is really going forward in the world[c] — — — And this at least I can say, that, whether we have laboured and suffered for the Lord, or only followed with our prayers those who have laboured, we have no cause to complain that we have either laboured in vain, or prayed in vain — — —]

3. In a way of excitement—

[All of us have a work to do; a work to which God himself has called us, and to which at the baptismal font we were set apart. Let me ask, then, whether we have engaged heartily in it? and whether, if we were called to give an account of it at this moment, we could say, "Father, I have finished the work which thou hast given me to do?" Know assuredly, that the whole Church will speedily be convened before the Judge of quick and dead: and "then must every one of us give account of himself to God." Say, brethren, whether, if called to that account, we should now "give it up with joy," or whether it would be "given up with grief." Let us think, also, what account we shall give of the efforts we have made in behalf of others. Have we "minded, not our own things only, but every one of us the things of others also?" Have we ourselves laboured, or have we, with prayer and fasting, co-operated, to the utmost of our power, with those who have gone forth to labour, in the cause of God? Think not that this was the duty of the primitive Christians only: it is no less ours than it was theirs. The cause of God ought to be dear to us; and the souls of our fellow-sinners should be precious in our eyes. Our charity, indeed, must begin at home: but it must not end there: it should be extended to the whole world: nor should we relax our efforts for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, till "all the kingdoms of the world shall have become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ."]

[c] Here any particulars may be mentioned, only with *diffidence* and *modesty*.

OUTLINE NO. 1783

THE QUESTION ABOUT THE OBLIGATION OF THE CEREMONIAL LAW DECIDED.

Acts xv. 10, 11. *Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.*

IT is a favourite idea with many, that the Gospels contain all that is needful for us to know, and that it would have been better for the Church if they only had been transmitted to us. But this is indeed to make ourselves wiser than God: for if God had not judged that the other parts of the New Testament would be useful to his Church, he would not have inspired men to write them, nor would he have preserved them for us with such peculiar care. We acknowledge that in the Gospels there are *intimations* of every thing which we need to know: but will any one say, that in the other parts of the New Testament there are not clearer *explanations* of them, or that the Gospels are not rendered far more intelligible by the light reflected upon them in the Epistles? Will any one say, that the purposes of God towards his Church, in the call of the Gentiles, the rejection of the Jews, and the future union of both Jews and Gentiles under one Head, are not more fully understood, than they would have been if the Acts of the Apostles had not been recorded? or that the correspondence between the law and the Gospel would have been so manifest, if it had not been pointed out to us in the Epistle to the Hebrews? We have now the advantage of knowing what objections were urged against the Gospel, and how those objections were obviated. To go no further than the passage before us: There was a controversy which agitated the whole Christian Church, insomuch that not all the authority of Barnabas or Paul were able to settle it: and a reference was made to the whole college of Apostles at Jerusalem for their

decision of the point. That we may have a just view of it, we shall consider,

I. The subject in dispute—

The question was, Whether the Jewish law was obligatory on the Gentiles?

[This I say, was the original question; but it involved much more, even the whole plan of the Gospel salvation.

Many insisted that circumcision[a], and the observance of the whole Mosaic law[b], were necessary to salvation. They contended that these were of Divine institution; that the observance of them constituted the grand line of distinction between the Lord's people, and all the rest of mankind; and that the severest judgments were threatened for a wilful neglect of them: and consequently, that they must be obligatory on the Lord's people to the end of time. (It must be remembered, that the advocates of these opinions were not Jews, but Jewish Christians.)

On the other hand, it was maintained, that these laws were never imposed with a view to men's justification by them; (for that Abraham was justified before even circumcision itself was ordained[c]:)—that to require the observance of them from the Gentiles was contrary to God's avowed design; (since he had manifested his acceptance of them in their uncircumcised state, precisely in the same way as he had of the Jews who were circumcised[d]:)—that it was impossible for any man to be justified by the observance of them; (since one single deviation from them would utterly condemn him[e]:)—and that to blend the observance of them with the merits of Christ as a joint ground of our hope, was to invalidate the whole Gospel, and to make Christ himself of no effect to us[f]—]

A question precisely similar is agitated amongst us at this day—

[Circumcision and the Jewish law are indeed, by common consent, rejected by us. But many amongst us proceed on the very same principle as those Judaizing Christians did, and make *works*, either ceremonial or moral, the ground of their hope before God.

Some, and some of no mean name, have gone so far as to assert, that the very act of baptism saves us. Verily, if such sentiments were not expressed in terms which cannot be mistaken, we should think it a libel to impute them to any man who calls himself a Christian, and much more to any one who would make his sentiments in theology a standard for the

[a] ver. 1. [b] ver. 5. [c] Rom. iv. 10, 11.
[d] Acts xi. 15—18. [e] Jam. ii. 10. [f] Rom. ix. 30—32.

Church of Christ. It seems incredible that such Jewish blindness should exist at this day in the Christian Church.

Others, even the great mass of nominal Christians, imagine that the attending of the house of God and the Lord's supper, together with common honesty, is sufficient to procure us acceptance with God; or that, if a little more be wanting, the merits of Christ will turn the scale.

Others, who come nearer to the Judaizing Christians of old, maintain, that though our hope is certainly in the Lord Jesus Christ, yet some works of ours are necessary to make his merits effectual for our salvation. This is a principle so generally avowed, that to controvert it would be called by many an unchristian heresy.

But (not to notice the two former opinions, which need only to be stated, and they will carry their own condemnation along with them,) this more specious principle is in reality founded on an ignorance of both Law and Gospel. For,

1. The moral law was not, any more than the ceremonial, given with a view to justify men: it was given rather to condemn them, and, as a ministration of death, to shut them up that they might receive life by the Gospel[g].

2. It is impossible that any man can be saved by his obedience to the law, because the law requires perfect obedience; which never has been, nor ever can be, rendered to it by fallen man[h].

3. To blend our obedience to the law with the merits of Christ, is to establish a ground for boasting; which it is the main scope and tendency of the Gospel to destroy[i].

4. Such an union of our works with the faith of Christ is declared to be an utter "subversion of men's souls[k]," and a superseding of all that Christ has done or suffered for us[l].

Here then the question, whether as debated formerly, or as existing at this hour, is fairly stated.]

We now come to,

II. The apostolic decision of it—

And here we will view,

1. The Apostle Peter's judgment respecting it—

[After the point had been long debated, St. Peter rose to give his opinion. His argument was extremely plain and simple. He reminded the Church, that the Lord Jesus had given to him the keys of the Gospel kingdom, and had commissioned him to open that kingdom both to Jews and Gentiles. To the Jews he had opened it on the day of Pentecost; and to the

[g] 2 Cor. iii. 7, 9. Gal. iii. 21—24.
[h] Gal. iii. 10.
[i] Rom. iii. 27. Eph. ii. 8, 9.
[k] ver. 24.
[l] Gal. v. 2—4.

Gentiles about six years afterwards, when he preached to Cornelius and his friends: and on both occasions God had given the same testimony of his acceptance to the people, pouring out upon the uncircumcised Gentiles, precisely as he had done on the circumcised Jews, his Holy Spirit, both in his miraculous and sanctifying operations[m]. From hence he inferred, that God had unequivocally declared his mind and will, and had shewn, beyond all controversy, that in *his* eyes "neither circumcision was any thing, nor uncircumcision was any thing; but faith, that worketh by love," was all that he required. To require therefore from the Gentiles an observance of the Mosaic law was to "tempt God, and to put on their necks a yoke," which God had never intended to impose.

Having stated thus the grounds of his judgment, he proceeded to give, what we may call, *his confession of faith.* He viewed salvation as a free gift of God to man, for the sake, and through the merits, of the Lord Jesus Christ. This salvation he regarded as wholly gratuitous in all its parts, and as equally so both to Jews and Gentiles: to the Jews it was not given because they were circumcised: nor should it be withheld from the Gentiles because they were uncircumcised: both to the one and the other it would be freely given, the very instant they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ[n]. No good works were required to merit it; nor was any thing required to make the merits of Christ more effectual: it was given freely, without money and without price; and from first to last must be wholly of grace.]

2. The sentence of the whole College of Apostles at Jerusalem—

[After Peter's sentiments were delivered, Paul and Barnabas confirmed his argument, by stating what God had done among the Gentiles by them; and, by thus uniting their testimony to his, they convinced at once the whole assembly. James, who appears to have presided in the council, drew up the sentence in which the whole Church concurred. He appealed to Simeon's, that is, Simon Peter's, testimony, as exactly according with the words of prophecy: and then declared that no such yoke was to be imposed on the converted Gentiles. There were indeed some things which, under existing circumstances, it would be necessary for the Gentiles to forbear. They in their unconverted state had not merely regarded fornication as lawful, but had actually practised it in their idolatrous worship: they must therefore be especially on their guard against this, not only because it was sinful in itself,

[m] Compare Acts xi. 15—18. with ver. 7—9.
[n] Compare the text with Rom. iii. 29, 30.

and therefore to be shunned by all, but because any approaches towards it would appear like a return to their former idolatry. On the other hand, there were some things forbidden to the Jews, such as "eating of things offered to idols, or things strangled, or the blood" of any animal; and it was necessary that the Gentiles should abstain from these things, lest they should put a stumbling-block in the way of the Jews, or cause disunion in the Church. But, as to their submitting to any rites, or their performing of any works, in order to obtain justification by them, no such thing was required, nor ought any such thing to be required: for, in fact, the requiring of them would only "subvert their souls," and ruin them for ever.

Now this decision goes to the whole question as it now exists: for, if the performing of any act in order to obtain salvation by it, either in whole or in part, was unlawful then, it is unlawful now; and if it would subvert their souls, it will equally subvert and destroy ours[o].]

We shall CONCLUDE with,

1. Some cautions respecting yourselves—

[In maintaining this doctrine, there are two cautions especially to be attended to: the one is, that you do not abuse it; and the other, that you do not ever lose sight of it.

Do not abuse it. If, by an indiscreet statement of it, you give reason to think that you despise morality, you will do incalculable injury to the souls of men. On the one hand, we must never be afraid to assert the doctrine of salvation by faith *alone:* but, on the other hand, we must shew the necessity of good works *as fruits and evidences* of our faith, and must declare in the strongest terms, that an unproductive faith is no better than "the faith of devils[p]." We have only to distinguish between the foundation and the superstructure of a building. Every one can see that they are both necessary, though not necessary *for the same ends:* so they may see that both faith and works are necessary, though *for different ends:* both are good in their proper place: but they are good only for the ends and purposes for which they are required[q].

Again: *Do not ever lose sight of it.* We see how even Peter himself was, not long after this, turned from the principles he had so firmly maintained[r]. So there is in us a wonderful tendency to lean to legal views, and self-righteous principles. Remember how jealous St. Paul was on this subject[s]; and "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free[t]."]

[o] Rom. xi. 6. Gal. ii. 16. [p] Jam. ii. 19, 20. [q] 1 Cor. iii. 11.
[r] Gal. ii. 11—14. [s] Gal. i. 8, 9. [t] Gal. v. 1.

2. Some directions respecting others—

[As the oppugners of our principles are apt to be intolerant towards us, so it sometimes is found that we speak too contemptuously of them. Now it is certain, that many who have an unfeigned zeal for God, have very imperfect views of this subject[u]: and they ought to be regarded by us with love, and be treated by us with the greatest tenderness. See how the whole Church met together to deliberate on this point for the satisfaction of their weaker brethren: and should not we exercise forbearance towards them, and labour with patience to lead them to clearer views of the subject? If God has given you a more just conception of this great mystery, be thankful for it; but make use of your knowledge, not for the indulgence of vain conceit, but for the edification of men, and the glory of God.

And whilst you seek the benefit of your fellow-Christians, do not forget your elder brethren, the Jews. "They have been broken off from their own stock on account of their unbelief; and we have been graffed in upon it:" remember them with pity, and strive by all possible means to promote their welfare. You see that the blending of their law with the Gospel was destructive to those amongst them who embraced Christianity: What then must be the state of those who reject Christianity altogether, and have no hope but in their law, which yet it is impossible for them, under their present circumstances, to obey? It is a shame to the Christian world, that we take so little pains to enlighten their minds, and to bring them to the knowledge of the truth. Consider then with yourselves what can be done for them, and how you yourselves in your respective stations may contribute to their good. And pray to God, that he will bring them back to his fold, and unite them with us under one Head, that "through the whole world there may be but one Lord, and his name one[x]."]

[u] Rom. x. 2, 3. [x] Zech. xiv. 9.

OUTLINE NO. 1784

INQUIRY INTO THE STATE OF THE CHURCH.

Acts xv. 36. *And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.*

IT is of the nature of divine grace to be always operative, and never to remit its exertions, whilst there is any good to be done. Under its superabun

dant influence, Paul and Barnabas were carried through all the labours and difficulties to which they had been expressly called by the Holy Ghost, and for which they had been set apart by the Church at Antioch[a]. But Paul, not content with having executed the work assigned him, desired to renew his labours, in order to the further advancement of it in all the Churches which he had planted: and for this end he proposed to Barnabas to go and visit all the Churches again, and see in what state they were: "Let us go again, &c. &c."

We will,

I. Consider this proposal, in reference to the Churches then formed—

It is impossible not to admire the spirit by which it was dictated, or to withhold our approbation from the proposal itself. It was,

1. A desirable proposal—

[Churches, like plantations in the natural world, are liable to great variations: they may thrive and flourish, or they may be blighted and wither. If we examine all the Churches founded by the Apostles, we shall find, that in some there were abuses, in others errors, in others divisions; and in all there were many things which needed to be checked by apostolic wisdom, and to be rectified by apostolic authority. But in Churches planted by these two Apostles, it might well be expected, that they should possess peculiar influence; because, in addition to the respect with which they would be regarded as Apostles of Christ, they would be considered by every one as standing to him in the relation of a father: and hence there would be in all places a ready acquiescence in their wishes, and a willing obedience to their injunctions. This was the effect which the Apostle expected to be produced at Corinth, when he said, "I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will; and will know, not the speech of them that are puffed up, but the power[b]:" and again, "The rest will I set in order when I come[c]."

Such, we doubt not, was the original design of episcopal visitations: and, if this great end were kept more in view, we

[a] Acts xiii. 2, 3, with xiv. 26. [b] 1 Cor. iv. 19. [c] 1 Cor. xi. 34.

have reason to think that the greatest possible good would result from them[d].]

2. A benevolent proposal—

[This was not a proposal for *an excursion of pleasure*, but for *a service of great difficulty and danger*. Conspiracies were often formed against their lives; and at one place Paul had been stoned, and left for dead[e]. In this respect Paul trod in the steps of his Divine Master, who, to the utter amazement of his Disciples, proposed to go up again to Judea, where his adversaries had just before sought to stone him[f]. Like him he "counted not his life dear unto him, so that he might but fulfil the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus:" he willingly endured all things for the elect's sake, that they might obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." Even where his labours were less acceptable, he willingly devoted himself to the service of his fellow-creatures, and would "gladly spend, and be spent, for them; though the more abundantly he loved them, the less he were loved." O that such benevolence were more common in the Church! O that every minister could appeal unto God, "how greatly he longed after his people in the bowels of Christ," and even "travailed in birth with them, as it were, again and again, till Christ should be manifestly formed in them[g]!"]

3. A beneficial proposal—

[Unhappily the proposal was an occasion of a very fierce contention between the two apostles. Not that Barnabas was less delighted to accept the proposal, than Paul was to make it: but Barnabas wished "to take with them John, whose surname was Mark;" which Paul could in no wise consent to do. Mark had accompanied them for some time in their former journey; but had forsaken them when he found that their work was attended with so much difficulty and danger: and on this account Paul thought him unfit for the labour, and unworthy of the honour, of attending them again[h]. In this matter neither of the Apostles would give way; so that they separated from each other, and, as far as we know, never saw each other again in this world[i].

To decide between the two, where God himself has not decided, is difficult: yet we apprehend that Barnabas was the

[d] If this were the subject of *a Visitation Sermon*, here would be an excellent occasion for shewing what inquiries should be made as to the *spiritual* state of the different churches, and *the effects produced by the ministry of the word*, in awakening the careless, in comforting the afflicted, in sanctifying the corrupt.

[e] Acts xiv. 5, 6, 19. [f] John xi. 7, 8. [g] Gal. iv. 19.

[h] Acts xiii. 2, 5, 13. with xv. 38. [i] ver. 39.

more blameable of the two; first, because he seems to have been too much actuated by partiality for *his nephew*[k]; and next, because the Church at Antioch appear to have sided with the Apostle Paul; "commending *him* with renewed earnestness to the grace of God," whilst Barnabas was suffered to depart without any such expressions of their regard[l]. Still it seems as if Paul himself was not wholly blameless, in suffering the contention to rise to such a pitch; when, if he had proposed to refer the matter to God with solemn fasting and prayer, we can have no doubt but that God would have made known to them his will respecting it.

The separation however was overruled for good: for Paul went with Silas, and Barnabas with Mark, each to his native country[m], where they hoped to labour with most effect; and thus "confirmed and established more Churches[n]" than they could have done, if they had executed the plan that was at first proposed.]

We will now endeavour to,

II. Fulfil the design in reference to the Church here present—

The design of their projected journey was, to inquire into the state of the different Churches which they had planted: "Let us go and see how they do." Now if such an inquiry was necessary among the apostolic Churches, doubtless it cannot be superfluous amongst us. We will direct our inquiry then,

1. Generally, to the Church at large—

[We are called a Christian Church: but are there not many amongst us who have no more of Christianity than the name? In the Church of Philadelphia there were some who "said they were Jews, and were not, but did lie[o]:" and so it is amongst us: there are many who "name the name of Christ," without ever once endeavouring "to depart from iniquity," or truly to give up themselves to him as his disciples. But, to speak rather of those who profess a love for the Gospel, and who therefore more resemble the primitive Church; are there not many who "have a name that they live, and yet are dead;" or, at least, "the gracious dispositions that remain in them are so weak, that they are ready to die[p]?" Are there not many who "have left their first love[q]," and are relapsed into such a lukewarm state, (neither cold nor hot,)

[k] Col. iv. 10. [l] ver. 40. [m] Acts iv. 36. and xxi. 29.
[n] ver. 41. and Acts xvi. 5. [o] Rev. iii. 9.
[p] Rev. iii. 1, 2. [q] Rev. ii. 4.

that they are as hateful to God as if they made no profession at all[r]? And are there not many also of whom it must be said, that "their works are not perfect before God[s]:" and that, instead of having "their last works more than their first[t]," they have lost much of their spirituality and devotion to God? Verily, if we were to address you all, as John did Gaius, and "wish your bodies to be in health, and prosper as your souls prosper," we fear that we should be wishing the greater part of you either sick or dead[u].]

2. Particularly, to different classes of Christians in the Church—

St. John divides the members of Christ's mystical body into three classes, "*little children*, *young men*, and *fathers*." We ask then of the "*little children*," in what state are you? Are you "growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?" and, in order to the promotion of that growth, are you "desiring and delighting in the sincere milk of the word[x]?" Are you sensible of your weakness and sinfulness; and looking to the Lord Jesus Christ to cleanse you daily in his blood, and to uphold you by his Spirit? And are you so diligent in every good work, as to "make your profiting appear unto all?" To the *young men*, of whom it is said that "the word of God abideth in them, and that they overcome the wicked one[y]," we next address ourselves: Do you indeed find that "the word of Christ dwells richly in you in all wisdom?" that the precepts are your guide, and the promises your support? Do you go forth with that "word as the sword of the Spirit," to fight with all your spiritual enemies? and do you shew from day to day, that you are gaining fresh victories over the flesh and all its lusts, the world and all its vanities, and the devil and all his temptations? If there be any amongst us who, on account of their long standing and their high attainments in the divine life, are worthy the name of *fathers*, we would ask of them, are you increasingly growing in an acquaintance with God, so as to "walk with him," like Enoch? and are you "forgetting all that you have attained, and reaching forth to still higher attainments, and pressing forward for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus?"

Let all of every class search and try themselves, that they may know what answer to give to such inquiries as these. The great High-Priest walketh among the seven golden candlesticks, and observes infallibly the state of every lamp, whether it be burning dimly, or its light be bright[z]: and to every one will

[r] Rev. iii. 15, 16. [s] Rev. iii. 2. [t] Rev. ii. 19.
[u] 3 John, ver. 2. [x] 1 Pet. ii. 2. [y] 1 John ii. 14.
[z] Rev. i. 14, 20.

he give according to his state before God[a]. Let this inquiry then lead you all to diligent examination, and redoubled earnestness in the ways of God: for "we have no greater joy, than that our children walk in truth[b]:" and "then we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord[c]."]

[a] Rev. i. 23. [b] 3 John, ver. 4. [c] 1 Thess. iii. 8.

OUTLINE NO. 1785

THE CONVERSION OF LYDIA.

Acts xvi. 14, 15. *And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.*

IN preaching the Gospel to mankind, every minister will not be alike successful; though every one may expect such a measure of success, as shall be a testimony from God to the truth of his declarations, and a seal to the commission with which he has been charged[a]. More especially may we hope to convert sinners unto God, if we are attentive to the calls of his providence, respecting the proper sphere of our labours. We may, like the Apostles, spread our net wide, and "toil all the night, and catch nothing:" but, if our Lord instruct us where to cast the net, we may hope to enclose a multitude of fishes. The commission given to the Apostles was, to "go and preach the Gospel to every creature:" yet there were particular places to which, at particular times, their attention was more especially directed. St. Paul, after going through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, would have gone into Asia and Bithynia; but he was forbidden by the Holy Ghost to go there[b]; and was instructed by a vision to go over rather into Macedonia[c]. There therefore he went; and there he met with the woman of whom our text speaks; and was

[a] Jer. xxiii. 22. [b] ver. 6, 7. [c] ver. 9, 10.

the happy instrument of saving her soul alive. Her name, her occupation, her character, and the place of her nativity, are all distinctly noticed: she was called "Lydia;" and was "of the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple" clothes; and a worshipper of the true God. We forbear, however, to dwell on these circumstances, in order that we may consider more fully the *means* and *evidences* of *her conversion*:—

I. The means of her conversion—

Lydia was, by nature, like all the rest of mankind: her heart was shut against the truths of the Gospel: nor could she either receive or know them, because she possessed not a spiritual discernment. But the Lord "knocked, as it were, at the door" of her heart, and constrained her to open to him: he fixed her attention to the subject which Paul insisted on; gave her an insight into it; inclined her cordially to embrace the truth; and thus "subdued her to the obedience of faith."

Now this is the way in which the work of conversion is always effected—

[We say not that every person is wrought upon as suddenly as she was; or that there are not many subordinate points in which the conversion of others may differ from hers: but we are sure that every natural man is blind to the Gospel of Christ[d]; that both the sublimity of its doctrines and the purity of its precepts is offensive to him; that an effort of omnipotence also is exerted to overcome the reluctance of his soul; and that, till that influence is felt, he will hold fast his delusions, "confounding good and evil, sweet and bitter, light and darkness."]

Nor can it be effected by any other means whatever—

[If good dispositions would effect it, or if human eloquence could effect it, she might have been converted without any such exercise of the Divine power; seeing that she was already "a worshipper" of the true God, and had Paul for her instructor. But we are expressly told, that the work of conversion depends not on any such circumstances, but that it is altogether the effect of a divine operation on the soul[e]. The Disciples, who had the peculiar advantage of our Lord's instructions for above three years together, and *that* in private as well as in public,

[d] 1 Cor. ii. 14. [e] John i. 13.

could not understand the most important parts of Scripture, till "he opened their understandings[f]." In like manner, there is yet a veil on the hearts of men whilst they read and hear the Scriptures; nor can any but God remove it[g]. Hence it is plainly declared by our Lord himself, that "no man can come unto him, except he be drawn of the Father[h]." However humiliating therefore the truth may be, we are constrained to say, in relation to every man that is converted, that the work "is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy[i]."]

That a great and effectual work was wrought upon her will appear, whilst we consider,

II. The evidences of her conversion—

Here we are called to notice,

1. Her public profession of the faith of Christ—

[She was not ashamed to acknowledge the conviction that had been wrought on her mind; nor was she afraid to confess her faith in Jesus of Nazareth. Accordingly, she was, together with all her household, baptized immediately, in token that she had embraced the Christian covenant, and was become a disciple of the Lord Jesus. This, it is true, was not a decisive proof of sound conversion; because some submitted to the rite of baptism who had not received the grace of God in truth[k]: but it was a strong *presumptive evidence* of her sincerity, inasmuch as it exposed her to all the obloquy and persecution, which were the common lot of Christians at that day. The insincere were deterred by these considerations from acting according to the dictates of their conscience[l]: but the upright uniformly and universally complied with them; and exerted their influence over their respective households, to bring them also by baptism into covenant with Christ.

In this, her example deserves *particular attention:* for though, on account of our having already received the seal of the covenant in baptism, we are not again to be baptized, yet are we to maintain the same fidelity as she did, and to shew, by the whole of our conduct, whose we are, and whom we have engaged to serve[m] — — —]

2. Her zealous attachment to the cause of Christ—

[She felt an ardent love towards him who had been the instrument of her conversion; and a most unfeigned desire to glorify her God, to whose grace alone she was indebted for

[f] Luke xxiv. 45. [g] 2 Cor. iii. 13—16. [h] John vi. 44, 45.
[i] Rom. ix. 16. [k] Acts viii. 13. [l] John xii. 42, 43.
[m] Rom. x. 10.

all the blessings she had received. Hence she desired, and urged the Apostles, if they accounted her sincere, to come and take up their abode under her roof. This was attended, not only with expense, but with considerable danger too[n]: but she had counted the cost in every way, and was well content to pay it.

This was an excellent evidence in her favour: for this kind of love is particularly specified by God himself as one of those "things which accompany salvation[o]:" and in a very eminent degree it may be considered as "fulfilling the law of Christ[p]." Respecting the exercise of such dispositions under the Christian dispensation, and the consecration of all our wealth to the service of our God, the Prophet Isaiah spoke repeatedly[q]: and wherever the grace of God reigns in the heart, it will produce these effects in the life and conversation[r].]

We shall conclude this subject with some REFLECTIONS naturally arising from it:

1. How necessary in divine ordinances is the Lord's presence!

[Of all the women who heard the Apostle at that time, we hear only of one who gave due attention to the things that were spoken by him: and the source of the difference between her and the others was, that "the Lord opened her heart." To this source must we trace all the good that is done by the ministration of the Gospel[s]: whoever be the preacher, God alone is the author of the blessing[t].]

2. How great are the obligations of those whose eyes are opened!

[Consider the change wrought on her at the time, and the effect of it on her everlasting state; what cause had she to adore and magnify the grace of God! So it is with all who are made monuments of Divine grace: they are indeed "brands plucked out of the burning;" and to all eternity must they ascribe their happiness, not to themselves, but unto Him that "chose them from before the foundation of the world," and gave them to his dear Son, to be the trophies of his redeeming love[u].]

3. How anxious should we be to adorn the doctrine we have received!

[Lydia did not wait to have this burthen imposed upon her; she sought of her own accord, and *that* with great earnest-

[n] Acts xvi. 22. and xvii. 6—9.
[o] Heb. vi. 9, 10.
[p] Gal. vi. 2, 10.
[q] Isai. xxiii. 18. and lx. 9.
[r] 2 Cor. viii. 7, 8.
[s] Isai. liii. 1. Acts xi. 21. 1 Thess. i. 5.
[t] 2 Cor. iii. 6, 7.
[u] John xv. 16. Rom ix. 16. Eph. i. 4—6.

ness, permission to bear it; yea, she accounted it not a burthen, but an honour and a joy. Thus it was with the Christians in the Churches of Macedonia[x]: and thus should it be with us also. We should long and pant after opportunities of honouring our God: we should value nothing any further than it may be subservient to that end: we should account ourselves, and all that we possess, as the Lord's property[y]; and we should make it the one labour of our lives to "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his."]

[x] 2 Cor. viii. 1—4. [y] 1 Cor. vi. 20.

OUTLINE NO. 1786

A SPIRIT OF DIVINATION CAST OUT.

Acts xvi. 16—18. *And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: the same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.*

IT has been thought by many, that all which the Scriptures speak respecting the possession of men by Satan, is merely figurative; and that the effects ascribed to such possessions must be referred to other causes. Accordingly, the expulsion of evil spirits from men by Jesus Christ is considered by them as only a cure of some particular disorders. But, if there be some passages which may possibly admit of such an interpretation, there are others that cannot be so explained. The damsel of whom our text speaks, is represented as having "a spirit of divination;" which, according to the opinion of the forementioned persons, was a mere fiction only, to impose upon the credulity of the weak. Her art is regarded as nothing more than a conspiracy between her and her masters to deceive the world by juggling and imposture. But, if this was the case, how could the command given by St. Paul to the spirit that was in

her, prevent her from practising the same deceits in future! Yet it did dispossess her of talents with which she had before been endowed, and deprived her masters of all hope of further gain from the exercise of those talents[a]. This is a clear proof, that she had really been possessed by an evil spirit; and that that spirit had imparted to her powers, different from any that are common to the rest of mankind. Without stopping to enter into the general question of Satanic possessions, which we consider as sufficiently determined by the fact recorded in our text, we shall confine our attention to the account here given of the damsel that was possessed; and shall notice,

I. The testimony she bore respecting them—

In considering her testimony, we notice,

1. The design of it—

[We doubt not but that it was intended to bring the Apostles into disrepute, and to induce a suspicion that they were in confederacy with the devil — — — This was a scheme which Satan had long before practised in relation to our Lord himself, who, knowing his subtle intentions, repeatedly interposed with authority to prevent his further exercise of this device[b] — — —]

2. The substance was perfectly correct—

[The testimony itself; the Apostles were "the servants of the Most High God;" and their one employment was, "to shew unto men the way of salvation." The same is true also respecting us: for though we are not called precisely in the same way as the Apostles were, nor have precisely the same commission given to us, yet we are truly "servants of God," sent by him, as his ambassadors, to bring men into a state of reconciliation with him; and we trust that, as it is our office, so it is our delight, "to shew unto men the way of salvation." "We come, preaching peace by Jesus Christ." We declare that "Christ is *the way*, the truth, and the life; and that no man cometh unto the Father but by him" — — — On the other hand, we declare, that God "will cast out none who come to him" in that way; and that "Christ will save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him" — — —]

However gratifying we might suppose such a

[a] ver. 19. [b] Luke iv. 33—35, 41.

testimony to be, it was far from being acceptable to the Apostles; as we see by,

II. The conduct they observed respecting her—

1. For many days they waited, to see what God might do by her means: but at last they commiserated her state—

[St. Paul was "grieved" at her, as well he might be: for, whilst she was bearing this testimony from day to day, she sought not the way of salvation for her own soul, and obstructed, rather than promoted, the salvation of others.

And have not *we* similar cause for grief on account of multitudes around us? Yes truly. There are many who espouse the cause of faithful ministers, and profess to believe the truths they preach, whilst yet they are altogether slaves of sin and Satan — — — Now such are greatly to be pitied, both on account of the state of their own souls, and on account of the injury they do to the souls of others. As it respects themselves, their knowledge only aggravates their guilt[c]; and their casting a stumbling-block before others involves them in a heavier condemnation[d] — — —]

2. They exerted themselves for her relief—

[Being endued with the power of working miracles, they commanded the evil spirit to come out of her: and that command, issued as it was in the name of Jesus Christ, instantly liberated her from her sore bondage.

To effect similar wonders is not in our power: but yet we are authorized to declare to men how they may obtain a similar deliverance. A believing application to Jesus will bring Omnipotence to their aid: and "the strong man armed" can no longer retain possession of their souls, when "the stronger than he," even the Lord Jesus Christ, comes forth to eject him. Are there any then amongst you who know the truths of the Gospel without experiencing their sanctifying and saving efficacy? Cry mightily to the Lord; and he will work effectually in your behalf: yea, he will make use of the words which ye now hear, to "turn you from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God" — — —]

Now this subject opens the way to some important DISTINCTIONS—

Let us LEARN from hence,

1. To distinguish between the advocates of the Gospel and the Gospel itself—

[c] John iii. 19. [d] Matt. xviii. 7.

[If any were hardened in their infidelity by means of that damsel, they were exceeding blameable: for her testimony did not at all affect either the persons respecting whom it was borne, or the Gospel itself. The adversaries of the Gospel are very fond of referring to the characters of its advocates; and if they can find that any of its professors have dishonoured it by their conduct, they will bring that as an argument against the Gospel itself. But was Jesus an impostor, because demoniacs confessed him to be the Christ? Were the Apostles less to be regarded as servants of the Most High God, because this damsel, by Satanic agency, bore testimony to them under that character? Or was the path, which they pointed out to men as the way of salvation, less worthy to be trodden, because it received her sanction? So then, neither is the Gospel less worthy of acceptance because some dishonour it by their conduct; nor are we the more to be considered as deceivers, because there may be amongst our hearers some who "hold the truth in unrighteousness." The Gospel is wholly independent both of those who preach it and those who profess it: we call upon you therefore to receive it with all humility of mind. Whatever be the character of its advocates or its opponents, it declares the only way in which a sinner can be saved: and to those who cordially embrace it, it shall be the power of God unto salvation — — —]

2. To distinguish between an approbation of the Gospel, and the actual experience of it in our own souls—

[Men, if they change their sentiments, and especially if they shew an attachment to the truths of the Gospel, are apt to think that they are truly converted unto God. But conversion is a change of heart, and not of sentiment only: it is "a renewing *in the spirit of our mind*." Let us inquire then, not merely whether we are "turned from darkness unto light," but whether we are "turned from the power of Satan unto God." If we are still habitually under the power of Satan in any thing, we have no part nor lot in the Gospel salvation. Let us then search and try our hearts; and beg of God also to search and try us, lest we deceive our own souls, and perish in our sins. True it is, that if we receive the Gospel aright, we shall, like Lydia, shew a cordial attachment to those who are sent of God to dispense it to us: but we shall delight also in the commandments of our God; we shall live nigh to God in the constant exercise of prayer and praise; we shall grow up into his image, and be advancing from day to day in righteousness and true holiness. See to it then, brethren, that ye have these evidences of conversion; for "then shall ye not be ashamed, when ye have respect unto all God's commandments."]

OUTLINE NO. 1787

THE CONVERSION OF THE JAILOR.

Acts xvi. 29—31. *Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*

VARIOUS are the ways in which God effects the conversion of sinners to himself. Some he draws by the attractive influences of his Spirit; causing his word to distil as dew upon their souls, and imperceptibly, as it were, opening their understandings (as he did Lydia's[a]), and inclining their hearts to embrace his truth. With others he deals rather in a way of fear and terror; filling them with compunction (as he did the converts on the day of Pentecost[b]), and awakening them from their security by some awful dispensation of his providence. It was thus that he impressed the savage mind of the jailor, whose conversion we are about to consider. By an earthquake at midnight, (an earthquake that shook the very foundations of the prison, and opened all its doors,) he first rendered him sensible of his guilt and danger, and stimulated him to make the inquiries, which terminated in the conversion and salvation of his soul.

The jailor's inquiry, and the answer given to it, will form the natural division of our text.

I. The jailor's inquiry—

In this there are two things worthy of particular attention:

1. The importance of it—

[There is no other concern in this world of so *great*, or so *universal*, importance. The inquiring, "What we shall eat, or drink, or be clothed with," is certainly necessary in this present state of existence: but those things are not worth

[a] ver. 14. [b] Acts ii. 37.

a thought, in comparison of the salvation of the soul[c]— — — Nor is there any human being who needs not this inquiry. All are sinners; and, as sinners, condemned: all therefore have reason to dread the wrath of God, and to ask how they may obtain mercy at his hands — — — Youth, learning, riches, do not at all supersede the necessity of this inquiry: all are liable to be summoned, at any moment, into the presence of their God, who is no respecter of persons, but will judge every man according to his works — — — They who have embraced the salvation offered by him in the Gospel, will be saved by him: they who have slighted and neglected it, whatever be their rank or condition in life, will perish.]

2. The manner in which it was made—

[Here we see *an earnestness suited to the object inquired after*, and *a determination of heart to follow any directions* which these servants of God should give him. He did not, like Pilate, ask with indifference, "What is truth[d]?" and then go away without waiting for an answer: nor did he, like the Jews at Rome, ask in a mere speculative or inquisitive manner, "We desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest[e]." It was with him a personal concern; a matter of the greatest importance. He had no disposition to cavil or dispute; but an ardent desire to know how he might obtain mercy at the hands of his offended God. They needed only to point out to him the way of life, and he was ready without hesitation to use the means prescribed, how difficult soever the task might be, or whatever sacrifices he might be called to make in the pursuit of this great object — — —]

And now let us see what was,

II. The answer given him—

Behold,

1. Its simplicity—

[Men, by cavils and disputes, have thrown obscurity over the plainest of all truths. To the proud and self-sufficient, the faith of the Gospel is made a stumbling-block: but to the humble and contrite, the light of the meridian sun is not more clear. Here are *no conditions imposed, no limitations fixed.* It is not said, "If you will do so many good works, Jesus Christ will accept you:" but simply, "Believe in him:" believe that he has died to save sinners; believe, that by the blood of his cross he has made reconciliation for you with God, and that he will save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him." Think not to purchase the Divine favour by any thing of

[c] Matt. vi. 31—33. The soul! Heaven! Hell! Eternity! what weighty considerations.

[d] John xviii. 38. [e] Acts xxviii. 22.

your own, but seek it as the free gift of God for Christ's sake. "Look" to Christ, as the wounded Israelites did to the brazen serpent; and "wash" in the fountain of his blood, as Naaman did in the streams of Jordan: then shall you "be healed" from your leprosy, and "be saved" from the deadly wounds of sin — — — Yes, you, notwithstanding the treatment you have shewn to us, his servants, and notwithstanding you have never thought of salvation till this moment of terror and alarm, even *you* shall surely, shall instantly, be saved by him, if only you trust in him with your whole heart — — — What beautiful simplicity is there in this way of salvation!]

2. Its efficacy—

["Sharper than a two-edged sword was the word" spoken by Paul and Silas. As it suited the jailor's case, so it reached his heart, and proved "the power of God to the salvation of his soul." *It instantly turned his sorrow into joy*[f] — — — *It* also *with no less rapidity, changed and renewed his soul.* But a few hours before, he had with unrelenting cruelty executed the commission which he had received from the persecuting magistrates; "thrusting these divine messengers into the inner prison, and making their feet fast in the stocks." But now "he took them into his own house, and washed their stripes, and set meat before them:" yea, "the very same hour of the night" did he thus evince the truth of his conversion — — — Finally, *it caused him, without hesitation, to become a determined follower of Christ.* Though he saw what he was likely to suffer for the truth's sake, he did "not consult with flesh and blood," or temporize at all; but immediately, with all his household, devoted himself to God in baptism, and avowed himself a friend of this persecuted religion.

Surely the wonder-working rod of Moses did not more clearly display the power of God, when it divided the Red Sea, or brought water from the rock, than this simple declaration did in the change it wrought on this ferocious jailor.]

ADDRESS—

1. The secure—

[When do you intend to begin this inquiry? Is it a fit employment for a dying hour? — — — Will the consciousness of having neglected it excite no fears when you are just entering on eternity, or leave no room for regret when you stand at the judgment-seat of Christ? — — — O that you were wise, and would consider your latter end! — — —]

[f] ver. 34. He was enabled to see the freeness, the suitableness, the sufficiency of the Gospel salvation, and to trust with confidence in the promises made to him in Christ Jesus. Thus were his fears dissipated, and his terrors changed into exultation and triumph.

2. The fearful—

[Some there are who make this inquiry, we trust, in sincerity, yet do not derive comfort from the Apostle's direction: they are so discouraged by a sense of their own unworthiness, that they are not able to lay hold on the promises of the Gospel: they are ready to think it would be presumption in them to expect mercy in so free a way. But, whatever have been their past state, they *may* come, yea, they *must* come to Christ in this way. If our unworthiness were a bar to our acceptance with God, who would ever be saved? — — — But the fact is, that such persons do not see enough of their unworthiness; for if they did, they would immediately perceive that they must come to Christ, as the most unworthy of his creatures, or lie down in everlasting despair.

Dear brethren, do not indulge pride under the garb of humility; but be willing to come to Christ as ye are. Only feel as the jailor did, and you need not fear but that you shall be accepted as readily as the jailor was — — —]

3. The believing—

[Doubtless some of you have been enabled to believe in Christ, and to found all your hopes on his atoning sacrifice. Let me then say to you, that you must not consider the work of faith as *done*, but merely as *begun*, and as necessary to be *carried on* every day and hour. You must "live still from day to day by faith on the Son of God" — — — At the same time, O let me remind you to "shew forth your faith by your works." You see how the jailor honoured God, by a cordial acquiescence in the terms proposed, a bold confession of the crucified Jesus, a thorough change both of heart and life, and a joyful expectation that not a tittle of God's word should fail. Go ye on thus, trusting in God with all your hearts, and glorifying God with all your souls.]

OUTLINE NO. 1788

PROOFS THAT JESUS IS THE MESSIAH.

Acts xvii. 2—5. *And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar.*

THE dispersion of the Jews through every part of the Roman empire greatly facilitated the diffusion of the Gospel in the apostolic age: for in all the capital cities of the empire there were synagogues, to which the Apostles had access, and where on the sabbath-days they were sure of meeting a large assembly of their countrymen. Of these advantages St. Paul invariably availed himself: for though he was "a minister of the uncircumcision," and was sent principally to the Gentiles, yet he in every place addressed himself in the first place to the Jews, and only turned to the Gentiles when the Jews had rejected the gracious tidings which he delivered to them. In discoursing with the Jews, he constantly appealed to the Holy Scriptures, which they themselves acknowledged to be of Divine authority; but, if in many instances he succeeded in convincing them, in many instances he failed.

In the passage which we have now read, we see,

I. The means he used for the conversion of the Jews—

Two things he laboured to establish;

1. That the Scriptures represented the Messiah as one who should die and rise again—

[To establish this, he adduced a multitude of passages which he knew to have been generally received, as descriptive of the Messiah. On other occasions we are informed what particular passages were cited: and from them we may guess what passages the Apostle insisted on at this time. He no doubt shewed the Jews, that the death and resurrection of the Messiah were *declared in* the plainest *prophecies*, and *shadowed forth in* the most significant *types*.

In speaking of the prophecies, he might well appeal to that very first promise that was given to man[a]: what could that mean, but that Satan was first to "bruise his heel," by bringing him down to the grave; and that Christ should afterwards, by his resurrection, "bruise his head," and destroy his empire in the world? In the Psalms these truths are yet more plain and express. It was said that the potentates of the earth should combine to destroy him; but that he should be seated on God's holy hill of Zion; and, being exalted to the right

[a] Gen. iii. 15.

hand of power, he should dash in pieces his enemies as a potter's vessel[b]. Again, "His soul was not to be left in hell, nor was this Holy One to see corruption[c]." Does not that clearly shew that his soul was first to go into hell, *i. e.* the place of departed spirits; that his body was to be consigned to the grave; and that he was afterwards to rise from the dead, and go into the presence of his Father, where there is a fulness of joy for evermore[d]? Again; his sufferings are, in the 22d Psalm, minutely described, as preparatory to that exaltation which he was to receive, when "the kingdom should be his, and he should be the Governor among the nations[e]." The Prophet Isaiah speaks of these things in as plain language as the New Testament itself. The Messiah, according to him, was to have his visage marred more than any man, previous to his sprinkling of many nations, and converting to himself the kings of the earth[f] — — — Daniel also speaks to the same effect, saying, that the very Messiah, who was to possess an everlasting kingdom, must nevertheless be first "cut off," though not for himself, but for his people's sins, to make reconciliation for their iniquities, and to bring in everlasting righteousness[g].

Now the Apostle would ask, Are not these passages contained in your Scriptures? and have not the most pious and learned men of our own nation considered them as predictions relative to their Messiah? And do they not in that view proved indisputably, that Christ *must* die and rise again?

We may conceive him, then, as proceeding to the types, by which these things were shadowed forth. What, he would say, meant the restoration of Isaac from the dead, but the restoration of God's only dear Son from the dead, after he had been offered a sacrifice for sin[h]? What meant all the Mosaic sacrifices, and the carrying of their blood within the vail, but the shedding of Christ's blood, and his going afterwards, as our great High Priest, with his own blood, into the holy place not made with hands; himself being shadowed forth, both by the victim that was offered, and the priest that offered it[i]? What meant that peculiar offering, the two birds; of which one was killed, and the other, dipped in its blood, was let loose into the air[k]? or that of the two goats, whereof one was slain, and the other, with all the sins of Israel put upon its head, led into the wilderness, that it might never more be seen of men? Were these of doubtful signification? Do they not prove clearly what the Messiah was to do and suffer; even that, for

[b] Ps. ii. 1—9. [c] Ps. xvi. 9, 10. [d] Ps. xvi. 11.
[e] Ps. xxii. 1—18, 22, 27, 28. [f] Isai. lii. 14, 15. See also liii. 9—12
[g] Dan. vii. 13, 14. with ix. 24, 26. [h] Heb. xi. 17—19.
[i] Heb. ix. 7, 11, 12. [k] Lev. xiv. 49—53.

the accomplishment of our redemption, he *must* die, and rise again from the dead? Did not Jonah too, that noted type of Christ, descend to the depths of the sea, before he was brought forth again on dry land?

Methinks he would dwell with delight on these unanswerable topics, and strive with all his might to fix conviction on their minds.]

2. That Jesus, whom he preached unto them, was the Christ—

[That Jesus answered to all these predictions in his sufferings, they could not doubt. It was a matter of public notoriety, that he had been put to death, even the accursed death of the cross. His resurrection indeed the Jews did attempt to deny: but the Apostles, who had seen and conversed with him after his death, and were endued by him with a power of working miracles in confirmation of their word, attested, with one voice, that he was risen, and had ascended up to heaven in their sight. This testimony they were ready to seal with their blood: and therefore they called upon all to believe in Jesus, as the person in whom the Scriptures had received their full accomplishment — — —]

One might have hoped that all should have been convinced by such testimonies; but, alas! there was a great diversity in,

II. The effects produced by them.

Some, we are told, believed—

[The word came to some of them "not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." These united themselves to the Apostles, and boldly professed their faith in Christ. Among these there was "a great multitude of Grecian proselytes, (who were more open to conviction than the native Jews;) and "of the chief women also not a few." Who does not congratulate these happy converts on the change that then took place within them? Even in this world, their happiness was greatly augmented; but what has been their state since they entered into the eternal world? Who can reflect on that, and not rejoice on their account? or who must not wish that all who now heard the Gospel, might experience the same blessed effects upon their souls? — — —]

Others opposed the truth with all their might—

[Here we see how "Christ came, not to give peace on earth, but rather division." As amongst his own hearers there were divisions, "some saying that he was a just man, and others, that he deceived the people;" so it was wherever his

Gospel was preached by the Apostles; and so it is wherever it is preached at this day.

But who were his opponents? Who? they were "certain lewd fellows of the baser sort." It is true that many of a different description were amongst the fiercest opposers of their doctrine; but the people here described were ever ready to lend themselves as instruments of persecution, and to carry into effect whatever the malice of their superiors should suggest. And such is the description of people who at this day are foremost in opposing the Gospel of Christ. The most abandoned characters, people who neither fear God nor regard man, will unite together to disturb the worship of Christ, or to procure the intervention of the civil power to suppress it. Not that they will oppose the Gospel *as good:* no: they will decry it as evil: they will represent the preachers of it as "turning the world upside down," and as enemies to civil government. This has been the device of wicked men in all ages[l]: and it is still the ground of accusation which they bring against the godly, wherever the Gospel is attended with success. They are envious at the influence obtained by those who preach the Gospel, and at the happiness of those who embrace it; and therefore they labour to silence the one, and to turn aside the other. To effect their purposes, they raise "an uproar," and then represent the godly as the causes of that uproar; and endeavour to incense against them every one who may be able to obstruct their progress. Let not such conduct then surprise us; for it was foretold, as soon as the Saviour came into the world, that he should be a butt of contradiction, "a sign that should be spoken against," and that he should be "set, no less for the fall, than for the rising again, of many in Israel:" and therefore we must expect to find, wherever he is exhibited in his true character, that he is a stumbling-block to those who will not flee to him as their sanctuary[m].]

From this subject we may LEARN,

1. That the Scriptures are the only just standard of truth—

[It is curious to observe, how continually, and how confidently, the Apostles refer to the Scriptures of the Old Testament. "What saith the Scripture?" is the question to which they recur for the settlement of every difficulty and every dispute[n]. Happy it is for us that we have a standard so plain, so accessible, so universally received. Let us bring

[l] Compare ver. 7. with Esth. iii. 8.

[m] Isai. viii. 14. with Luke ii. 34.

[n] Rom. iv. 3. and xi. 2. Gal. iv. 30. So also Rom. ix. 17. and x. 11. and 1 Tim. v. 18.

every sentiment to that test, and try it by that touchstone — — — "If men speak not according to the written word, there is no light in them[o]."]

2. That the knowledge of Christ, as dying and rising again for us, is the one appointed mean of salvation—

[It was with Jews that the Apostle argued: yet the Jews did worship the only true God, and professed to reverence his holy law. But when the Gospel was fully preached, the Jew could no longer be saved by the observance of his own law: he must embrace the Gospel, and look to Christ as the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Thus also must all act who bear the Christian name: they must not be contented with an outward conformity to the Gospel, but must embrace it as "all their salvation and all their desire." As for the opposition that is made to the life and power of the Gospel, it is rather an argument in its favour than otherwise: for thus the Gospel ever has been treated; and thus it will be, as long as there shall be an ungodly man upon earth. But, if the whole world should rise up against it, let it be our endeavour to receive it in our hearts, to confess it with our lips, and to adorn it with our lives.]

[o] Rom. viii. 20.

OUTLINE NO. 1789

THE GOOD EFFECTS OF A CANDID ATTENTION TO THE GOSPEL.

Acts xvii. 11, 12. *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed.*

THE clamour often raised against the Gospel is no argument against the Gospel itself. God's messengers have in all ages been opposed by the ungodly. Even our Lord himself, who spake as never man spake, was credited by very few; but there will always be found some who will give the truth a favourable reception. Different hearers are differently affected with the word they hear in these days. This however only shews that human nature is the same now that it was in St. Paul's time.

I. Wherein the Beræans excelled the Thessalonians—

The Jews in Beræa had been educated in the same prejudices as those in Thessalonica: yet their conduct was in perfect contrast with that of the Thessalonians. They excelled,

1. In candour—

[The Thessalonians would not so much as consider what they heard from the Apostle: but the Beræans "inquired whether these things were so." They did not conclude every thing to be false which did not accord with their preconceived opinions. This was a noble spirit, because it shewed that they were not in subjection to their prejudices.]

2. In equity—

[The Thessalonians, not satisfied with rejecting the word, were filled with wrath against those who delivered it unto them[a]. Nothing could be more contrary to equity than thus to calumniate the innocent, and persecute the messengers of heaven. The Beræans, on the contrary, made a diligent use of the means afforded them for solving their doubts: they "searched the Scriptures," which they considered as the only standard of truth, and to which the Apostle himself had appealed; they "searched them daily," that they might form their judgment upon the surest grounds: they would neither receive nor reject any thing which they had not maturely weighed.]

3. In a regard for truth—

[Truth was neither sought for, nor desired by, the Thessalonian Jews. Loving darkness rather than light, they strove to extinguish the light which shone around them. But the Beræans "received the word with all readiness of mind:" they were glad to get instruction in matters of such moment: their hearts were prepared for it, as melted wax for the seal[b]. Thus they acted as beings endowed with reason, while the Thessalonians resembled irrational and ferocious beasts.]

Suited to their noble disposition[c] was,

[a] They misrepresented the principles of the Apostle, stirred up a tumult against him, assaulted his friends under colour of justice, obliged him to flee for his life, followed him with unrelenting animosity to Beræa, and, notwithstanding the acceptance he met with there, drove him from thence also.

[b] See Rom. vi. 17. which, in the Greek conveys the idea of being cast into a mould.

[c] Even a heathen saw that such a virtuous disposition constituted the only true nobility. "Nobilitas sola est, atque unica, virtus." Juv. Sat. 8.

II. The benefit which accrued to them by means of it—

Many at Beræa became obedient to the faith—

[While the Thessalonians rejected the overtures of mercy, the Beræans thankfully embraced them. By believing in Christ they became partakers of his salvation; and now are they rejoicing before the throne of God, while the contemners of the Gospel are gnashing their teeth in hell. Who can duly appreciate the greatness of this benefit?]

This benefit resulted from the noble disposition which they exercised—

[Faith is certainly the gift of God[d]: nor can any disposition that is in us merit that gift. But there is a preparation of mind requisite for a due reception of the Gospel; and where that state of mind is, there truth will make its way. This arises from the very structure of the human mind, which, like the eye, beholds things imperfectly when diseased, but clearly when free from blemish[e]; and it is both illustrated and confirmed by various examples in Holy Writ[f]. Where the "honest and good heart" is, there the seed will spring up, and bring forth fruit[g].]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who never have believed—

[Guard against the illiberal conduct of the Thessalonians. Avoid a captious, envious, persecuting spirit: cultivate the more noble spirit of the Beræans: take the Scriptures as the test of truth[h]: search them with care and diligence[i]: compare what you hear with them[k]: pray for wisdom, that you may discern aright[l]: rest assured that you shall not use these means in vain[m].]

2. Those who have believed—

[Love instruction, and improve all opportunities of gaining it[n]. Seek to be more established in the faith[o], but weigh every sentiment in the balance of the sanctuary[p], and let the Scripture be your study and delight[q].]

[d] Eph. ii. 8. Phil. i. 29. [e] Matt. vi. 22, 23. with Prov. ii. 10, 11.
[f] Nicodemus; John iii. 2. Cornelius; Acts x. 33. And Lydia; Acts xvi. 14. [g] Luke viii. 15.
[h] Isai. viii. 20. [i] John v. 39. [k] 1 Thess. v. 21.
[l] Jam. i. 5. [m] Prov. ii. 1—6. [n] Prov. iv. 5—9.
[o] Col. ii. 6—8. [p] 1 John iv. 1. [q] 1 Ps. i. 2, 3.

OUTLINE NO. 1790

REPENTANCE ENJOINED.

Acts xvii. 30. *The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.*

THIS is one of the most celebrated discourses in all the inspired volume. Being delivered to heathen philosophers, he did not make any appeal to the Jewish Scriptures, as he did whenever he addressed the Jews; but argued with them on their own principles. The drift of his argument was, to shew that there was but one God, and not many, as they supposed: that all things owed their existence to him, and not to chance: that all things were ordered by him, and not by fate: that all men were bound to live to him, and not unto themselves: and that all should give account of themselves to him at the judgment-seat of Christ; of which event God had given them an assurance, by raising Christ from the dead. As for all the speculations of human wisdom, in which these learned philosophers were so deeply engaged, they were all vain. But "God, who had hitherto winked at the times of this ignorance, now commanded all men everywhere to repent."

The points for our more immediate consideration are three:

I. The forbearance once exercised—

[We are not to imagine that God has ever *connived at* sin: for "he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity" without the utmost abhorrence[a]. But he exercised all possible forbearance towards those who committed it, knowing how blind and ignorant they were; and that, consequently, their iniquity, though heinous, was comparatively light. He had not sent prophets to them, as he had to his own people; except indeed to Nineveh, in the ministration of Jonah: so that they had sinned against less light and knowledge than his own people; whom, on account of their more aggravated guilt, he had visited with most signal judgments. Had he not borne with the heathen in their wickedness, he must again and again have destroyed the earth; either by water, as at the deluge, or by fire, as he had done to Sodom and Gomorrha. But he

[a] Hab. i. 13.

had "endured them with much long-suffering," even to that very day.

In fact, this same forbearance is yet exercised towards the heathen world, and on the very same account. Probably not so much as one-sixth part of the world has ever heard of the name of Jesus Christ: so that the times of ignorance yet continue to a most fearful extent: and, if it were not that God's mercy is infinite, his judgments must, of necessity, have long since been poured forth, to overwhelm the whole world.

Perhaps it is somewhat of the same consideration which still operates on the mind of God to withhold his judgments, which at this moment hang, as it were, by a single thread, over the heads of millions amongst ourselves. He sees how ignorant they are; and he yet bears with them, in the hope that they may yet "turn from their idols, to serve Him, the only true God."]

The Apostle, however, proceeds to state to his audience,

II. The injunction now given—

["God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." He no longer leaves men to indulge their own vain reasonings and empty speculations. He has now revealed his will; which he makes known, not as a deduction from uncertain premises, or as a recommendation of doubtful expediency, but with an authority that supersedes all reasoning, and a plainness that dispels all doubt. Nor does he address this revelation to the followers of any one particular sect, as the philosophers did their injunctions: no; "he commandeth *all* men, *everywhere*, to repent." This was the very scope of his Gospel, as introduced by John the Baptist and our blessed Lord; "Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand:" and it is also the substance of the Gospel, as committed afterwards to his Apostles, who were ordered to "preach repentance and remission of sins, in his name, unto all nations[b]." Accordingly, on the day of Pentecost, the address of Peter to his audience was, "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out[c]." In fact, "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," comprehend all that we have to deliver at this day; and, as ambassadors from God, we do inculcate them, as authoritatively enjoined by God himself, and as indispensably necessary for every child of man[d] — — —]

Having stated God's command, the Apostle proceeds to shew,

[b] Luke xxiv. 47. [c] Acts iii. 19.

[d] The nature of true *Evangelical* repentance may be here opened.

III. The urgent necessity which lies upon us all to comply with it—

[" God has appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness." It is not left to men's option, whether they will embrace the sentiments proposed to them in the Gospel, or obey its injunctions: they must obey them, at the peril of their souls. The philosophers could only advise. They knew nothing of a future state of retribution. If occasionally they hinted at such a state, it was with extreme uncertainty, and without the least idea of the rule by which they should be judged, or the person by whom their sentence should be awarded to them. But the Apostle declared to them God's determination respecting these things: and I also declare, that every soul amongst us shall, ere long, " stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, to receive according to what we have done in the body, whether it be good or evil." Then will our compliance with this injunction be inquired into, and that declaration of our blessed Lord be fulfilled, " Except ye repent, ye shall all perish[e]" — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. The careless—

[Whether ye be amongst the number of learned philosophers, or of the illiterate poor, I must equally call upon you to repent. The injunction is universal. There is no exception, in behalf of *any place*, or *any person*, under heaven. The old, the young, the rich, the poor, the learned, the unlearned, must all repent, or be condemned at the tribunal of their Lord, and " take their portion for ever in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone." Dream not, brethren, that, because God has borne with you hitherto, he will not visit your sins at last: for he has declared, that " his Spirit shall not always continue to strive with you;" but that, if you do not speedily return to him in penitence and faith, he will give you up to final impenitence, and leave you to " treasure up wrath against the day of wrath." O " let his long-suffering be accounted by you as salvation[f]," and " let his goodness lead you to repentance[g]."]

2. The repenting sinner—

[Sweet beyond description are the expressions in my text, as bearing on your state. Does God so authoritatively *command repentance?* then will he assuredly have respect to it, wheresoever he finds it: nor is there a creature in the universe so vile, but he shall obtain acceptance with his God, through the instrumentality of penitence and faith — — — Humble yourselves, then, before God, in dust and ashes, and plunge

[e] Luke xiii. 3. [f] 2 Pet. iii. 15. [g] Rom. ii. 4.

into "the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness[h]:" so shall all "your sins be blotted out, as a morning cloud," and you shall stand before God "without spot or blemish." So shall your "repentance be unto life," even "a repentance to salvation not to be repented of." *The very Saviour in whom you trust, shall be your Judge;* and he will award to you the glory he has purchased for you ———]

[h] Zech. xiii. 1.

OUTLINE NO. 1791

A DAY APPOINTED FOR CHRIST TO JUDGE THE WORLD.

Acts xvii. 31. *He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.*

IN order to form a just estimate of the benefits which we have received from revelation, we must not look to the sentiments of philosophers in this day, but to those which were entertained by the wisest of the heathen world. Modern philosophers, even while they pretend to despise the sacred oracles, have derived from them, either immediately or remotely, all that light which has elevated them above the heathen. We must therefore go back to the Sages of Greece and Rome, who had no other guide than unassisted reason. Among them we shall find the most astonishing ignorance respecting truths which, amongst us, are universally received, and familiar to the meanest capacities. Athens had been the most distinguished seat of learning in the world; and even at the time when this history was written, was still in very high repute: yet there did the most stupid idolatry prevail, insomuch that the number of idols there was greater than in any other city in the world. Their wise men, not content with deifying almost every thing that could come into their minds, raised an altar To THE UNKNOWN GOD: from which circumstance St. Paul took occasion to "make known to them HIM, whom they thus ignorantly worshipped."

His address to them on the occasion forms a lively contrast with the abstruse speculations and vain reasonings which universally prevailed among them. He told them that there was one God, who was the Creator and Governor of all things, who claimed from them a spiritual worship, and whom exclusively they were bound to serve; who also had appointed a day in the which he would judge the world by that Man whom he had ordained, even Jesus, whom he had raised from the dead.

We do not see in this address any just ground for those extravagant encomiums that have been passed upon it, as though it was the summit of human eloquence: but we account it a sober, judicious, luminous exposition of the first principles of true religion; well adapted to inform the minds of his audience, and to dispel the vain imaginations with which they had hitherto been blinded.

The point to which we shall direct our attention at this time, is the assurance here given us of a future judgment. The assertions contained in our text are two:

I. That there is a day fixed in which the world shall be judged—

The day of judgment is certainly fixed—

[" Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world:" much more therefore must so important a work as that of judging the world be fixed in the Divine counsels. It is true, the period is not known to any human being, nor to any angel in heaven; no, nor even to the Son of Man himself; at least it was not made known to him as man, for the purpose of revealing it to the world[a]. But it is every moment approaching; and will come as unexpectedly upon the world as the deluge did, or as it would do if it were to arrive at this moment[b].]

On its arrival, the whole race of mankind shall be called to judgment—

[All the successive generations of men, from Adam to that very hour, shall be called forth from their graves[c]. Their

[a] Mark xiii. 32. [b] Matt. xxiv. 37—42.
[c] John v. 28, 29. Rev. xx. 12, 13.

respective bodies, however long ago, and in whatever various manner they may have been consumed, shall be restored to life, and be united to their souls; the personal identity of every individual being preserved, and every one answering for the things which he himself did in the body.

As to the difficulties which may be supposed to prevent the execution of this design, it is sufficient to say, that God has pledged himself to accomplish it: and he who formed the whole creation out of nothing at first, will find no difficulty in re-uniting the scattered atoms of his creatures at the last day.]

The judgment shall then be passed on them in perfect righteousness—

[The actions of all will then be weighed in a perfect balance. Every thing that tended to enhance the value of them, or aggravate their malignity, shall be taken into consideration; and the quality of them be ascertained with the utmost precision. Every word, every thought, yea, every imagination or counsel of the heart, shall then be brought to light, and have weight in augmenting our happiness or misery to all eternity[d]. The rewards indeed will be rewards of grace; but still our good works shall be the measure according to which they shall be bestowed upon us: our punishments, on the other hand, will be proportioned exactly to our guilt and demerit: nor shall there be a creature in the universe who shall not acknowledge the equity of the Judge in these proceedings[e].]

The foregoing truths were revealed, though with comparative obscurity, to the Jews: but in the New Testament, in addition to the fuller revelation there given of it, we are informed,

II. That Christ is the person by whom that judgment will be dispensed—

The Father, we are told, "hath committed all judgment to the Son," and "given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man[f]:" and this appointment is in many respects desirable—

[It is desirable *for the vindication of his honour*. Though he was the Son of God, "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person," yet was he accounted "a worm and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people." But in that day will his reproach be rolled away; and he will appear in his true character, "King of kings, and Lord of lords" — — —

[d] Rom. ii. 16. 1 Cor. iv. 5. [e] Rev. xv. 3. [f] John v. 22, 27.

It is desirable also *for the humiliation of his enemies.* How will they, who so triumphed in his destruction, stand appalled, when they shall see "the stone which they rejected, become the head-stone of the corner!" when they shall behold him seated on his throne, and hear him say, "Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me!"

It is desirable also *for the comfort of his people.* Unspeakable is the comfort of reflecting, that He who was our Saviour will be our Judge. If we believe in him, and confide in his promises, will he deceive us? If we plead the merit of his blood, will he not admit that plea? Yea, will he not rather be a witness for us in that day, that, whilst we were in this world, we "lived by faith in the Son of God, as having loved us, and given himself for us?" — — —]

Nor is it less certain, than it is desirable—

["God has given us assurance of it, in that he has raised up Christ from the dead." Had Jesus not been raised, we might well have doubted all that he had spoken respecting his future advent: but this was such a confirmation of his word as did not admit a doubt: it was a proof that could not be counterfeited, and that must carry conviction to every mind. However strange, therefore, our Lord's predictions respecting his second coming must have appeared to those who saw him only as a poor despised man[g], and however confident his judges were in pronouncing such assertions to be blasphemy[h], we may be fully assured, that all judgment is committed to him, and that we shall all stand at his judgment-seat, to receive from him our final doom.]

Since then this awful day is fixed in the Divine counsels, and is so rapidly approaching, let us indulge the following REFLECTIONS:

I. How earnestly should we engage in the great work of repentance!

[This is a work necessary for every child of man: and "God hath *commanded* all men every where to repent." He will no longer "*wink at*" our blind security: he has now given us the last and fullest revelation of his will; and, if we improve it not to the salvation of our souls, he will visit us with his heaviest displeasure[i]. Let us not, like the Apostle's auditors, "*mock*" at these tidings, or *defer* the attention they deserve[k]:" but let us "seek the Lord whilst he may be found, and call upon him whilst he is near." We "know the terrors

[g] Luke xiii. 3. Rev. xiv. 10, 11.
[h] ver. 32.
[i] 2 Cor. v. 10, 11.
[k] Gal. vi. 7, 8.

of the Lord; and therefore we would persuade you," by every consideration that can influence the mind of man.]

2. How carefully should we guard against self-deception!

[We easily deceive ourselves; but we cannot deceive our God. Hence St. Paul gives us this solemn caution; "Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap: he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; and he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. Surely, if we will investigate the point with any degree of candour, it will be no difficult matter to ascertain whether we are sowing to the flesh, or to the Spirit — — — Let us deal faithfully then with our own souls; and "judge ourselves, that we may not be judged of the Lord."]

3. How diligently should we maintain communion with our risen Saviour!

[To walk with him now by faith, is the sure way to be prepared for his future advent. He will now communicate to us of the abundance of his grace: he will shed abroad his love in our hearts: he will manifest himself to us as he does not unto the world. If we belong to him, we may regard him as "our Forerunner, gone before to prepare a place for us," and coming again shortly to receive us to himself, that where he is, we may be also. The true light in which to view him is, that which is shadowed forth to us by the high-priest going into the holy place to offer incense; whilst the people waited for him without, till he should come forth to bless them[l]. Let us then wait and look for him, and he will soon come the second time to our complete, our everlasting salvation[m].]

[l] Luke i. 9, 10, 21. [m] Heb. ix. 28.

OUTLINE NO. 1792

THE CHARACTER OF GALLIO.

Acts xviii. 17. *And Gallio cared for none of those things.*

WE are assured that not one jot or tittle of God's word has ever failed, or ever can fail. But, for the trial of our faith, and for the more abundant manifestation of his own truth and faithfulness, God is often pleased to let events of so dark a nature arise,

that it shall appear almost impossible for his word to receive its accomplishment. Thus he did in relation to the Israelites in Egypt. He had promised to Abraham, that before the expiration of four hundred and thirty years, he would bring his posterity out of Egypt. The time appointed had just arrived, when he sent his servants, Moses and Aaron, to lead them forth; but, so far from succeeding in their efforts, they only augmented the labours and sufferings of their oppressed countrymen: and, when the very last day had arrived, they were plainly warned by Pharaoh, that, if they attempted to come into his presence again, they should die. What now must become of the veracity of God? Did his word fall to the ground? No: *that very night* did God send a judgment, which caused the Egyptians to thrust them out. In like manner did the Lord Jesus act towards the Apostle Paul. It should seem that Paul had felt discouraged at the little success of his labours during his long stay of a year and six months at Corinth; and that he had begun to yield to some desponding fears. Our blessed Lord, for his encouragement, appeared to him in a vision, and told him, he should be successful in planting a large Church there, and that "*none should set on him to hurt him.*" But behold, "when Gallio was deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment-seat, saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law." Here it is manifest that *they did* "*set on him,*" and that too with the most brutal ferocity: but did they "*hurt* him?" No: the Governor would not listen to their complaints. This occasioned a great tumult in the court, insomuch that the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat *him* before the judgment-seat. Why did they not, in their rage, beat *Paul?* Why did they wreak their vengeance on a friend of Paul's, and not on Paul himself? God's word had been pledged for *Paul;* and therefore not a hair of his head could be touched. Gallio, who should have been Paul's protector, "*cared for none*

of those things:" but God cared for Paul; and it was impossible for man to "*hurt* him." The indifference of Gallio left Paul entirely at the mercy of his enemies: but "the word of God could not be broken;" and therefore Paul was as safe from injury, as he would have been even in heaven itself.

The account here given of Gallio is deserving of particular consideration; and the rather, as very different opinions have been formed respecting it. We propose therefore,

I. To form an estimate of his character—

It is not so much from a single expression that we are to form our judgment, as from a view of all the circumstances under which he acted, and all the persons with whom he had to do. It will be proper to notice his character,

1. As exhibited in his conduct on this occasion—

[Gallio acted in a double capacity, as *a man*, and as *a magistrate*. In his *official* character, whilst we applaud his moderation, we think him highly deserving of blame. As a Governor, even if no reference had been made to him, he should have endeavoured to prevent an innocent man from being oppressed by an enraged multitude, and should have required the criminality of Paul to be established before any punishment should be inflicted on him: but when a direct reference was made to him for judgment, he should on no account have left him at the mercy of his enemies. What though he did not feel himself competent to decide the points at issue between them; he might easily see whether the points at issue were of such importance to the public welfare as to demand a judicial examination: and, if necessary, he might have appointed a commission of persons qualified to examine it under his sanction and authority. At all events, he should not have left the people to take the law into their own hands. In relation to Sosthenes also he was highly criminal: for a magistrate ought on no account to suffer such an open and flagrant violation of the law, as that which took place in the very seat of judgment. A magistrate should "not bear the sword in vain: he is God's representative and vicegerent upon earth; and he ought to be both "a terror to evil-doers, and a praise to them that do well." In shrinking from the execution of his office, whether through indolence or fear, he violates his duty both to God and man.

Nor do we more approve of him in his *personal* conduct, as

a man. He had long heard of Paul, and of the wonderful exertions he made in propagating what he professed to be a revelation from heaven. We can make some allowance for a Governor, circumstanced as Gallio was, not sending to Paul to get information from him respecting the doctrines he preached: but now God had sent the man into his very presence; and Paul was actually about to declare those very truths, which Gallio should have earnestly desired to hear: yet when "God had given him this price to get wisdom, he knew not how to use it." Here then we blame him exceedingly: his indifference here betrayed a total want of all religion, and an utter disregard of all that should have been interesting to an immortal being. The historian evidently intends to fix a stigma upon him; and Gallio well deserved it; and, as long as the world shall stand, he will be the representative of all who are regardless of their eternal interests.]

2. As compared with the other characters with whom he had to do—

[We pass over Sosthenes and his persecutors, because we cannot absolutely determine who they were: but we think that Sosthenes had shewn himself desirous of screening Paul; and that the Greeks were instigated by the Jews to vent their rage on *him*, because *he*, who, as ruler of their synagogue, might have been expected most warmly to espouse their cause, had now begun to take part against them.

The other two parties are *the persecuting Jews*, and *the persecuted Apostle*. In comparison of the former, Gallio appears to advantage: for *they* were seeking to destroy a man merely for his *opinions*, and for *endeavouring, in a peaceful way, to disseminate those opinions;* whereas *he* was tolerant, and refused to sanction so unreasonable a proceeding. He justly distinguished between gross violations of the law, which no government should tolerate, and certain differences of opinion which might consist with the undiminished welfare of society. As a friend to toleration therefore, he merits our applause: and we regret that those who professed themselves the people of God, were so inferior to a heathen in appreciating and upholding the rights of man.

But if we compare him with the persecuted Apostle, he sinks to the lowest state of degradation. Behold the Apostle! it was his "care for these things" that involved him in all his trouble: had he been content to go to heaven alone, he might have avoided all these bitter persecutions. But he knew the value of an immortal soul; and was "willing to endure all things for the elect's sake, that they might obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." He went everywhere to find out men whom he might instruct in the

way to heaven: whereas Gallio, with that very instructor in his presence, would not even trouble himself so much as to hear what he had to say. He accounted Christianity as no other than a strife about words, and therefore undeserving his notice. Unhappy man, to have so little concern for thine immortal soul, and such a brutish indifference about thine eternal welfare! The ox and the ass will condemn thee for thy stupidity and folly.]

Such being our estimate of Gallio's character, we proceed,

II. To deduce from it some lessons of instruction—

His character not being wholly destitute of what, in a comparative view at least, may be approved, we shall DEDUCE OUR LESSONS,

1. From the better part of his character—

[Two things we may learn from this; namely, *not to indulge a spirit of intolerance;* and, *not to be carried away by popular resentment.*

That a political necessity may exist for *withholding certain privileges* from some, is beyond a doubt: but nothing can justify the *inflicting of pains and penalties* upon any, on account of their religious sentiments. Man is, not only at liberty, but bound, to worship God according to his conscience: nor is any man in the universe authorized to obstruct him, unless there be something in his conduct contrary to good morals, or to the public peace. In the nation at large, this is well understood and practised: but amongst individuals there are many who would be as intolerant as the Jews of old, if the laws did not protect the persons who differ from them. This however is a hateful spirit, and on no account to be countenanced or indulged.

On the other hand, there are many who are too easily influenced by popular opinion; and who would rather consent to the oppressing of a religious character, than withstand the public voice in his support. But if we suffer the cause of Christ and his people to be run down, because we have not courage to defend it, we are more guilty far than Gallio: we are like to Pilate, who, to pacify the Jews, and save his own credit with the Roman emperor, delivered up Jesus to the will of his blood-thirsty enemies. True indeed, we ought not to proceed in the violent and haughty manner that Gallio did: there are different ways of doing the same thing: we may act with suavity, though we comply not with the requisitions made to us: and this is the way in which we should act, whenever any attempts are made to prejudice our minds against God

and his people: we should resolutely withstand the efforts of ungodly men, and maintain against all opposition the immutable laws of equity and love.]

2. From that part of his character which is unquestionably bad—

[Here also we will mention two things; namely, *not to be indifferent about the concerns of others*, and *not to be lukewarm in the concerns of our own souls.*

Doubtless we are not to be "busy-bodies in other men's matters;" but, on the other hand, we are not to say, "Am I my brother's keeper?" We are told "not to look every man on his own things; but every man also on the things of others[a]." If in *temporal* matters we can benefit our fellow-creatures, we are "debtors to them," to do them all the good in our power. And, if we may advance their *spiritual* interests, we should account no labours too great, nor any sufferings too heavy to be encountered in so good a cause. This sentiment has of late gained a currency in this kingdom, beyond all that could ever have been expected. What exertions have not been made in sending missions to the heathen; in disseminating the Holy Scriptures throughout the world; and in educating the children of the poor, that they may be able to read the words of life! For the children of Abraham also, that debased, but highly interesting people, are efforts now used; and, we trust, will be used to a yet greater extent amongst us. The concern expressed also through the land for our fellow-subjects in India is highly creditable to the nation. But still there is abundant room for the display of our benevolence in every place where our lot is cast: and we cannot but earnestly pray, that it may no longer be said of any amongst us, "They mind every man his own things, and not the things that are Jesus Christ's[b]."

But, in order to maintain a zeal for the good of others, we must begin at home, and cherish a concern for our own souls. To keep the garden of others will be of little avail, if we neglect to cultivate our own[c]. The salvation of our own souls must be our first and great concern: in comparison of this, the whole world should be of no value in our eyes. Let us then regard the Lord Jesus Christ, and an interest in him, as "the pearl of great price," for which we are readily to part with all that we possess. "Whatever our hand findeth to do in reference to our eternal state, let us do it with all our might." Let us "*strive* to enter in at the strait gate;" remembering, that "many *seek* to enter in, but are not able." Let us bear in mind, that no rank or station of life can exempt us from the

[a] Phil. ii. 4. [b] Phil. ii. 21. [c] Cant. i. 6.

duty of "caring for these things." About the things of this world we may relax our care: there are few who do not run into a criminal excess in their attention to them: in reference to them, we think no anxiety too great, no labour too abundant: whilst the interests of the soul are deemed unworthy of any care. We mean not that worldly things are to be neglected; but that, whilst we are "not slothful in business, we should be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."]

OUTLINE NO. 1793

CHARACTER AND MINISTRY OF APOLLOS.

Acts xviii. 24—28. *And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: for he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ.*

IT is a weighty saying of our Lord, "To him that hath, shall be given; and from him that hath not, shall be taken away that which he seemeth to have." Universal experience attests the truth of this: the man who has talents of any kind will improve them by use, and lose them in a great measure by neglect. In religion especially this law of our nature obtains: indeed it obtains in religion more than in any thing else; because, in addition to the gain or loss which the cultivation or neglect of any thing will of necessity occasion, God himself will interpose in the things which relate to him, either to reward the observance of them by a further communication of his blessings, or to punish the neglect of them by a withdrawment of his grace. Of the former of these, namely, the increase of well-employed talents, we have an instance in the history before us. Apollos, when he began to

serve the Lord, had but a very contracted view of the things which he proposed to teach: but God so ordered it, that his exertions in the cause of religion should introduce him to the acquaintance with Aquila and Priscilla, and be the means of bringing him to the full knowledge, and complete enjoyment, of the Gospel of Christ.

In the account here given of him, we notice,

I. His qualifications for the ministry—

These were certainly of the highest order: he possessed many qualities admirably suited to the work in which he was engaged. They were of two kinds;

1. Intellectual—

[He had a natural gift of *eloquence;* I say, a natural gift; because it was a faculty distinct from that which may be acquired by study. Some men have in the very constitution of their minds a facility of conceiving clearly, and expressing readily, whatever they wish to impart. Some, however learned they may be, can never acquire that which we call eloquence; they have some embarrassments which they cannot surmount, or some deficiencies which they cannot supply. Others, with very little learning, can talk fluently and perspicuously upon any subject on which they have bestowed the smallest attention. This is a valuable talent, especially to any one who is called to instruct or persuade others — — — and happy was Apollos in the pre-eminent measure of it which he possessed.

But, besides this, he was *well versed in the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures.* "He was mighty in the Scriptures," being able to bring them to bear upon any point which he wished to discuss, and to shew from them what was agreeable to the mind and will of God. "The word dwelt richly in him in all wisdom" — — — This also is of the utmost importance to one who undertakes to teach others, since the sacred volume is the armoury from whence he must take all the weapons for his warfare, and the treasury from whence alone he can procure the riches which he undertakes to dispense.]

2. Moral—

[He was "*fervent in spirit;*" glowing with zeal for the honour of his God, and ardently longing for the salvation of his fellow-creatures — — — This in a minister is indispensable: the difficulties which he will have to encounter are very great, and fervour of spirit is necessary to carry him through them; nor can he hope to be extensively useful to others,

unless he lay himself out in the service of God to the utmost of his power.

To this was added that most amiable of all graces, *humility of mind.* Notwithstanding his natural talents and eminent acquirements, he was willing to be instructed by any one who could advance him in the knowledge of the Lord. Aquila was only a mechanic, and not invested with the sacred office of a teacher: yet when he and his wife Priscilla invited Apollos to their house in order to "expound to him the way of God more perfectly," Apollos thankfully accepted their invitation, and diligently availed himself of their instructions. This is an excellence rarely found in persons who are high in popular estimation: the admiration with which they are honoured, too often puffs them up with vain conceit, and indisposes them to learn from those, whom they regard as their inferiors in station or attainments: but the more rarely such docility is found, the more highly should it be appreciated, and the more carefully should it be maintained.]

Thus endowed, he greatly distinguished himself by,

II. His ministerial exertions—

He improved for God whatever talents he possessed—

[When he was only partially "instructed in the way of the Lord," and knew nothing more than what he had learned from John the Baptist, he instructed others to the utmost of his power with great *boldness*, and *diligence.* The doctrines which John the Baptist had preached were in direct opposition to the habits of the world, and were sure to call forth the enmity of those who would not part with their sins: but Apollos feared not the face of man; but both "spake" *in private*, and "taught" *in public*, and that too with unremitting activity, the things which he considered as of such vital importance to the welfare of mankind. When he himself was more fully instructed, he desired to extend the sphere of his labours, and to proceed to Corinth, to supply, as he was able, the place of Paul. Then especially did he make Christ the one great theme of all his discourses. "The things of the Lord," as far as he understood them, he had before declared: he had warned men of the Messiah's advent, and had called them to repent, in order to get their hearts duly prepared for a suitable reception of him: but now he saw, not only that the Messiah was come, but that Jesus of Nazareth was he, and had done and suffered all those things which had been predicted of him. Thus, in the scope of his ministrations, he determined, with the Apostle Paul, to "know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified:" and, though we have not the

same occasion to prove the Messiahship of Christ, since that is universally acknowledged amongst us, yet are we called to magnify the importance of that truth, and to commend it to men's attention, as the source of all their happiness.]

In his labours he was useful to many souls—

[He "mightily convinced the Jews," so as to stop the mouths of some of the more obdurate, and to bring the more candid of them to the acknowledgment of the truth. Nor were his labours of little service to the Church of God: on the contrary "he helped *them* much, who had believed through grace." It was through the operation of divine grace alone that any had believed: "whether Paul planted, or Apollos watered, it was God alone that gave the increase:" but still, it was no slight benefit to the garden of the Lord to be watered by such a hand as his: and no doubt he contributed greatly both to the growth and fruitfulness of those trees of righteousness which God's right hand had planted.]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who labour in the ministry, or are preparing for it—

[Let Apollos serve as a guide for you. If you possess good natural talents, account it your honour to consecrate them to the service of your God. And, in the employment of them, do not inquire where you may gain most credit to yourselves, or most consult your present ease and interests, but inquire rather where you may do most good; and be ready to exercise your ministry wherever the providence of God may call you. Moreover, if called to labour where a more honoured servant of the Lord has gone before you, do not draw back through a pretended sense of your own insufficiency; but be willing to have your talents and services undervalued, and to be nothing yourselves, that God may be all in all.]

2. To those who have received good by the ministry—

[To God you must ascribe the praise for all that you have received; since to whomsoever you are indebted as an instrument, the benefit proceeds from God alone, who "gives to every man" according to his own sovereign will and pleasure. It is possible that you who have long known the Lord, may be called to attend the ministry of one who may be comparatively a novice in the ways of God; and you may be tempted on that account to despise him in your hearts, and to lower him in the estimation of those around you. This, alas! is the conduct of many; but it is a most sinful conduct, and utterly unworthy

of their Christian profession. Instead of indulging such a proud contemptuous spirit, you should rejoice in every appearance of good, and endeavour to impart to him a fuller knowledge of the truth. This would render good service both to God and man: and it is a service which all may render, if only with meekness and modesty they watch for an opportunity, and look up to God for his blessing on their endeavours. And who can tell how "much you yourselves may be helped" afterwards by him, to whom you have been helpful in the first instance? It is worthy of observation, that Aquila did not commence preacher at Corinth, notwithstanding his clear knowledge of the Gospel, and notwithstanding Paul had just left the place: he did not think himself authorized to take on him an office to which he was not called: but he laboured in private conversation, and was made eminently useful in that way: and we cannot but recommend to every one amongst you, whether male or female, to imitate this pious couple in a modest unassuming carriage, and in an affectionate concern for the best interests of mankind.]

OUTLINE NO. 1794

THE POWER OF CHRIST AND HIS GOSPEL.

Acts xix. 15. *And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?*

GREAT effects are wrought by the Gospel, wherever it is preached with faithfulness and zeal: churches are filled, sinners are awakened, saints are edified, and the name of the Lord Jesus is magnified. But, in those who feel not its influence, there is an universal proneness to ascribe these effects to other causes than those from which they really proceed. Some consider them as arising from the manner in which the preacher addresses his audience; from the loudness of his voice, for instance, or from the earnestness of his gestures: others ascribe them to the enthusiastic sentiments with which his discourses are filled, or perhaps to the terribleness of his denunciations. Any reason, however absurd, will be resorted to by them, rather than they will acknowledge the hand of God in these things. Thus it was in the days of old: when our blessed Lord cast out devils from people who were possessed, the spectators ascribed his

works to a confederacy with Satan, rather than to the agency of the Spirit of God. In like manner, when his Apostles cast out devils in his name, many supposed that they wrought their miracles by means of magical incantations. Hence some, and, in particular, seven sons of a Jewish priest, thought by the use of the name of Jesus to produce the same effects. But Satan soon shewed them their mistake; infusing a more than human strength and courage into the man whom he possessed, and falling upon the seven exorcists with such irresistible fury, as to convince all, that he could be vanquished only by an almighty arm. His address of defiance, which we have just read, will lead me to set before you,

I. The power of Christ and his Gospel—

When Satan had prevailed over our first parents, a promise was given that the Son of God should become incarnate, and bruise the head of that serpent that had beguiled them[a]. Accordingly, Christ came in due season to effect for men the promised deliverance: and he accomplished it,

1. Personally—

[The first encounter which he had with our great adversary was in the wilderness, just previous to his entering upon his public labours; and there, after withstanding his repeated assaults, he drove him, as it were, from the field of battle, saying, "Get thee behind me, Satan." During the course of his ministry, he exerted an irresistible power over this wicked fiend, expelling him from multitudes whom he had possessed, and constraining him to confess himself a vanquished enemy[b]. Towards the close of his life he experienced the yet fiercer assaults of Satan, attended by all the hosts of hell: "This," says our Lord to the Jews, "is your hour, and the power of darkness:" but he triumphed over them, agreeably to that word, "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out;" now shall "the prince of this world be judged[c]." Upon the cross indeed he appeared to suffer a defeat: but there, and there chiefly, he gained the victory: "through death he overcame him that had the power of death, that is, the devil[d];" yea, upon the cross, "he spoiled principalities and powers, and

[a] Gen. iii. 15. [b] Mark i. 27. [c] John xii. 31. and xvi. 11. [d] Heb. ii. 14.

made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it[e]." In his resurrection and ascension he completed his triumphs, "leading captivity captive[f]," and "putting all his enemies under his feet[g]."]

2. By the ministry of others—

[When first our blessed Lord sent forth his twelve Apostles, he gave them a commission, not to preach only, but to "cast out devils[h]:" and to such an extent did they execute this, that they were quite surprised, and said with wonder, "Lord, even the devils are subject to us through thy name:" to which our Lord replied, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven[i]." We have lately seen that St. Paul cast out a spirit of divination[k]; and in the chapter from whence our text is taken, we are told, that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried from the body of Paul, and were made effectual by the power of God to the casting out of many evil spirits[l]. In ejecting them from the *souls* of men he was more honoured than any other of the Apostles. When first he received a commission to preach the Gospel, it was said to him by our Lord, "I send thee to turn men from darkness unto light, and *from the power of Satan* unto God[m]:" and how successful he was in destroying Satan's empire, and in enlarging the kingdom of Christ upon earth, his history, as recorded in the New Testament, together with his different epistles, abundantly testify. For many hundreds of years, it must be confessed, this great adversary of God and man has re-established his dominion almost over the whole world, as well where Christ is named, as in those regions where the light of his Gospel has never shined. But still the Lord Jesus has not left himself without witness, that he has vanquished Satan, and can render the weakest of his people victorious over him: "his word is yet quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword;" and it is still as "mighty as ever to pull down the strong-holds of sin, and to cast down every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ[n]." Indeed at this very hour the Lord Jesus is "riding on in the chariot of the everlasting Gospel, conquering and to conquer;" so that Satan must still repeat his former acknowledgment, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know:" yes, he does know, that Christ is "Lord of lords and King of kings," and that "his Gospel is still the power of God unto the salvation" of men.]

But though Christ and his Gospel are so powerful, experience proves,

[e] Col. ii. 15. [f] Eph. iv. 8. [g] Ps. cx. 1.
[h] Mark iii. 14, 15. [i] Luke x. 17, 18. [k] Acts xvi. 18.
[l] ver. 12. [m] Acts xxvi. 18. [n] 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

II. The insufficiency of all created power to eject Satan—

None but that stronger man, the Lord Jesus, has ever been able to prevail against "the strong man armed:" Till attacked by the Lord Jesus, "Satan keepeth his goods in peace:" He defies,

1. All false religions—

[Go back to the days of old; What was effected by any of the philosophers of Greece or Rome? They did not even themselves experience a sanctifying efficacy from their own doctrines: and much less did they prevail to destroy the power of Satan in the hearts of their disciples. Look at the votaries of Pagan idolatry, or Mahometan delusion: What evidence do they shew that their principles have made them victorious over Satan? We may safely affirm, that the very means which they use for obtaining the Divine favour, serve only to rivet on them more forcibly those chains of Satan wherewith they are bound — — —]

2. A nominal profession of the true religion—

[The Lord Jesus did, for wise and gracious purposes, suffer many to "cast out devils in his name," whom yet he will banish from his presence in the day of judgment, and exclude for ever from his heavenly kingdom[o]. But never did any person cast out Satan from his heart by merely naming the name of Christ. We need only look on the Christian world, and we shall see how little a mere profession of Christianity can effect. The generality of Christians are in reality little better than baptized heathens. There are some few points of morality in which they may differ from the heathen; but in all the more common sins, of pride, lewdness, covetousness, together with the whole band of spiritual and fleshly lusts, they are as much enslaved by them as any heathen can be. In proof of this, we need not cast our eyes on others: we need only inspect the workings of our own hearts, and we shall have abundant evidence of this melancholy truth — — —]

3. All self-righteousness or self-confident exertions—

[To these men generally resort in the first instance, when they desire to overcome this wicked fiend. But he derides their efforts as weak and vain: he well knows that human power, however strenuously exerted, will prove only like Elisha's staff, which could not re-animate the breathless corpse

[o] Matt. vii. 22, 23.

on which it was laid[p]. To all such efforts he says in his heart, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?" It should seem indeed, that men, feeling the authority of God's law, and the terrors of his wrath, should be able to effect any thing: but our arm is paralysed, and we cannot stretch it forth, unless the Lord Jesus Christ himself enable us. Hence we are told, that "what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sent his own Son to effect, namely, to condemn sin in the flesh, and to cause that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us[q]." We need only call to mind the case of Peter, to convince us, that our strongest resolutions are only as tow before the fire, when we are under the influence of any violent temptation; and that, unless the Lord Jesus strengthen our faith, Satan will sift us as wheat, and manifest us to be light as chaff.]

APPLICATION—

In this subject all are interested: for though the states of men are widely different from each other, we all have to do with this great enemy, as captivated by him, or conflicting with him, or victorious over him. We will address ourselves therefore to these different classes: to,

1. The captivated—

[But where shall we find any of this description? We read indeed in the Scriptures, of some who are "taken in the snare of the devil, and are led captive by him at his will[r]:" but are there any such in our day? The idea of Satanic influence is almost expunged from modern creeds: but if we believe the Bible, we must believe that this influence still operates on the minds of men. Would we know whether it is exerted over us? it will be no difficult matter to determine this. Are we disobedient, wilfully and habitually disobedient, to any one command of God? it is Satan that instigates us to that rebellion[s]. Are we ignorant of the Gospel as our one source of life, and peace, and holiness? it is Satan that blinds our eyes, and keeps us from beholding the light of the knowledge of the glory of Christ[t]. Consult then the experience of your souls on these points: inquire into the liveliness of your faith, and the conformity of your practice to the word of God; and, unless you have been truly converted by the grace of Christ, you will be constrained to acknowledge, that you are under the power of that cruel adversary. View then your state, and see how deplorable it is: the condition of that poor

[p] 2 Kings iv. 31. [q] Rom. viii. 3. [r] 2 Tim. ii. 26.
[s] Eph. ii. 2. [t] 2 Cor. iv. 4.

demoniac mentioned by St. Mark, is a melancholy picture of yours, who are breaking through all the restraints of God's holy law, and inflicting the most deadly wounds upon your own souls[u]. O beg of God to shew you what a miserable state you are in, and to interpose with his almighty power for your speedy deliverance.]

2. The conflicting—

[To those amongst us who have commenced a warfare against sin and Satan, we would particularly say, Remember where your strength is: it is not in yourselves: you "have not in yourselves a sufficiency even to think a good thought:" "your sufficiency is altogether in God," and in the Lord Jesus Christ, "without whom you can do nothing[x]." Hear the voice of God to you on this subject; "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts[y]." Be on your guard then, "lest ye lean to your own understanding," or "trust," even in the smallest degree, "in an arm of flesh." You are indeed to "be strong;" but it must be "in the Lord, and in the power of his might[z]." You are to go forth armed; but not in armour framed by human skill; that would be to you as useless as Saul's armour was to David: there is a whole suit of armour provided for you by God; and in that you must be clothed[a]: arrayed in that, and especially taking with you the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit, you need not fear: Satan well "knows" the power of soldiers thus arrayed; and "he will flee from those who thus resist him[b]." Inquire of those who are now triumphant in heaven; and ask them, how they gained the victory. The answer from every one of them will be, "We overcame him by the blood of the Lamb[c]:" we trusted to that blood, to "obtain mercy for us, and grace to help us in every time of need:" and we were not disappointed of our hope: we fought; we gained the victory; and "Satan was in due time bruised under our feet."]

3. The victorious—

[It may seem presumptuous to speak of such in this present world; but such there are, and such, we trust, amongst us[d]. We do not indeed imagine that there are any, against whom Satan does not sometimes gain advantage; but we are persuaded that there are some amongst us who maintain a good, and a successful warfare. To such then we say, If God has made you to differ from others, give glory to that adorable Saviour, who has strengthened you by his Spirit, and enabled

[u] Mark v. 2—5. [x] 2 Cor. iii. 5. John xv. 5.
[y] Zech. iv. 6. [z] Eph. vi. 10. [a] Eph. vi. 11—17.
[b] Jam. iv. 7. [c] Rev. xii. 11.
[d] 1 John ii. 14. and v. 18.

you to withstand so potent an enemy. To this you are called by the history before us. The failure of these presumptuous exorcists served to illustrate more fully the success of the Apostle, in and by whom the Lord Jesus wrought: and you are told, "The name of the Lord Jesus was magnified[e]." Magnify then your Saviour for every victory you gain, and say, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise." And, if you see others victorious around you, be not envious of them, because they are not of your sect or party,—as the Apostles once were[f]; but rejoice with them, and glorify God in their behalf.

But, however victorious you are, remember that you are still on the field of battle, and may, if off your guard, receive the most deadly wounds. We read of those, "whose hearts, once delivered from an evil spirit, were again occupied by seven other spirits more wicked than he; and whose last end was therefore worse than their beginning[g]." O beware, lest at last it prove thus with you! Be ever on the watch, guarding against the wiles and devices of your subtle enemy, and crying mightily to God to protect you from him.

Learn from the people who beheld the miracles of Paul: they did not put their impious books upon a shelf, but "*burned them*," and that publicly too, without any regard to their great value; determining that they should never more prove a snare to themselves, or to any other persons[h]. Deal ye thus with your besetting sins: spare not one of them, no, not for an hour; but cut off the offending hand, and pluck out the offending eye. Then shall you have daily fresh cause for praise and thanksgiving[i], and ere long obtain that crown of righteousness, which God has promised to all his faithful and victorious servants[k].]

[e] ver. 17. [f] Luke ix. 49, 50. [g] Luke xi. 24—26.
[h] ver. 18, 19. [i] Rom. vii. 24, 25.
[k] 2 Tim. iv. 8. Rev. iii. 21.

OUTLINE NO. 1795

GENUINE REPENTANCE.

Acts xix. 18—20. *And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.*

IT seems that, in former ages, Satan had a greater power over the persons and concerns of men than we at this time imagine him to possess. That, in the days of Moses, there were persons who professed to have connexion with Satan, and to cause, through his influence, effects surpassing the power of man to produce, we cannot doubt: because he says to all the people of Israel, "There shall not be found among you any one that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer[a]." And it can scarcely be doubted but that powers superhuman were occasionally exercised by them. The magicians of Pharaoh, I think, gave a satisfactory evidence of this. Persons so influenced, were confederates with Satan. But there have been others, especially in the apostolic age, possessed by him against their will; and it should seem that he was permitted to infest men in a more than ordinary degree at that time, in order to give an opportunity for the Lord Jesus Christ to manifest, in a more abundant measure, how entirely the whole creation was under his controul. A remarkable occasion had just offered itself to the notice of the people at Ephesus. Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish priest, professing themselves exorcists, undertook to expel a demon from a person that was possessed; and, for that end, adjured the spirit, in the name of the Lord Jesus, to depart from him. But the spirit acknowledging his inability to withstand the command of Jesus, when uttered by one who was duly authorized to issue it in his name, stirred up the man to fall upon them with irresistible fury; and "they all fled out of the house naked and wounded," happy to escape even with their lives. This was so strong a testimony to the Lord Jesus, that it carried conviction to the minds of multitudes; and determined them instantly to renounce their confederacy with Satan, and to approve themselves, in the face of the whole

[a] Deut. xviii. 10, 11.

world, the faithful servants of Christ. Their conduct on this occasion will lead me to shew,

I. What effects the Gospel produced on them—

Some amongst them had already "believed" in Christ; but not so as to come under the full influence of the Gospel[b]. Others were wrought upon at this time; the wonder, which they beheld, impressing them with a conviction which they had not felt before. A general sentiment now pervaded the whole assembly: and "many, who had used curious arts, now brought their books together, and burned them before all men;" thus shewing, that, through the grace of God, they were enabled to obtain a victory over,

1. The love of this world—

[They had been held in high repute for their skill in magic; and probably, like Simon the Sorcerer, had induced many to regard them with the utmost veneration, "as the great power of God[c]." But now they "confessed," before all, that they had been impostors: "they shewed their deeds," and took shame to themselves as deceivers of the people. The very books, whereby they had been enabled to keep up the deception, they devoted to destruction: and thus gave to all a most unquestionable evidence of their shame, their sorrow, and contrition.

Thus they shewed their disregard of *worldly honour*. And the same contempt they manifested, also, for their *worldly interests*. These books were numerous, and of exceeding great value. At the lowest calculation, they would have sold for 1500*l.* of our money: and, if the owners had been anxious about their temporal interest, they might easily have found an excuse for converting their property into money. But they preferred the honouring of God, in the destruction of property that must be so hateful to him. And in this sentiment they were all of one accord and of one mind.]

2. The principle of sin within them—

[Perhaps this was the greatest sacrifice that they could make; since, from a variety of considerations, both of honour and of interest, these books were regarded by them as their dearest treasure. But they were afraid lest these books, if retained by them, should become a snare to them in future; or, if sold by them, become an occasion of sin to others: and in either case the evil would be incalculable. They now felt

[b] See John ii. 23—25. [c] Acts viii. 9—11.

the bitterness of sin; and would gladly, if possible, root it out of their own hearts, and prevent its continuance in the world. Hence, so far as they could by this act effectuate that holy purpose, they determined to do it. At all events, they saw that this sacrifice would glorify their Lord and Master; and evince, to all who beheld it, that nothing hostile to his interests and his honour should be suffered to exist.]

From this slight sketch of the power of the Gospel, we may see,

II. What effects it may well be expected to produce on us also—

Its effects are uniform in every age and every place[d]: in every soul where it gains a due ascendant, it will produce, so far as circumstances will admit of it, the same feelings in reference to sin;—the same feelings, I say,

1. Of shame and sorrow—

[The true penitent will call to mind the evils he has committed, and will be ready to "confess them" before God and man. The things which once contributed to the advancement of his reputation and interests in the world he will now be ready to paint in their true colours, and to take shame to himself on account of them. There is scarcely any sin which is not extenuated by some specious appellation, if not dignified also by some honourable name. But the true convert views every thing in its reference to eternity. He tries his ways by the standard of God's word, and judges himself as he will be judged at the last day. Nor will he now be afraid to bear his testimony before all men, both by word and deed, that God alone is to be served, and that every thing contrary to His will is to be abandoned. He will not plead for sin of any kind, however fashionable, however gainful, however pleasant: he will endeavour to destroy it, root and branch; "not retaining a right hand or a right eye," that may by any means displease his God, or prove a snare to his own soul[e].]

2. Of indignation and abhorrence—

[This, in particular, was evinced by the people at Ephesus, and is pre-eminently characteristic of real penitence. See it in the Corinthian Church, when they were made sorry after a godly manner: "Behold this self-same thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you; yea, what clearing of yourselves; yea, what indignation; yea,

[d] Col. i. 6. [e] Matt. v. 29, 30.

what fear; yea, what vehement desire; yea, what zeal; yea, what revenge. In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter[f]." Thus will repentance manifest itself in every upright soul. It will not only mourn for sin, but will put it away, and most especially the besetting sin. Has a man been addicted to worldliness, or intemperance, or impurity? if he be a penitent, he will cut off occasion for the indulgence of his evil propensities, and shun the company, the scenes, the very thoughts, that would be likely to kindle in him a desire after his unhallowed gratifications. He will put far from him the incentives to sin; and as carefully avoid the becoming a snare to others, as the indulgence of sin in his own soul. Nor will he be content with this: no; he will enter his protest against the lusts by which he has been led captive; and will endeavour, by his public deportment, to undo all the evil which, by his example, he has countenanced in the world. O, brethren, tell me whether this be the habit of your minds; and whether it can be said of you, that "in all things ye are proving yourselves to be clear in this matter."]

From hence we may SEE,

1. What a blessing the Gospel is to the world—

[This is its true and genuine effect, wherever it comes: this is its operation on individuals and kingdoms, so far as its influence extends. Truly, it will destroy the reign of Satan, and establish the authority of Christ throughout the world. Think what it did in the apostolic age: think what it has done even in this place. Say, has it not wrought on many of you, my brethren, as it did on those at Ephesus; so that you have not only "cast your idols to the moles and to the bats;" but you would, if it were possible, annihilate the very existence of sin within you? Well: the time is coming when these effects shall be seen over the face of the whole earth; and all those nations that are now under the dominion of Satan, shall "become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ[g]."]

2. How to judge respecting our reception of it—

[The calling of ourselves "believers" will not prove us to belong to Christ. Of those in our text many are said to have "believed," whilst yet they were far from possessing saving faith. Till their faith wrought by works, it was no better than the faith of devils: for "faith without works is dead." Take, then, the conduct of these Ephesians as a test whereby to try yourselves. Are you filled with the same holy zeal that

[f] 2 Cor. vii. 9—11.

[g] If this were the subject of a *Mission Sermon*, the habits of the Heathen might here be depicted.

animated them; the same determination to mortify sin in yourselves, to discountenance it in others, and to bear your testimony before the whole world, that Christ alone is to be served and honoured and obeyed? Bring yourselves, I say, to this test; and see whether your conduct speaks for you, as theirs did for them. Call not this enthusiasm: it is not enthusiasm, but duty, yea, and the duty too of all that believe in Christ. Rise, then, to this, my brethren; and beg of God so to assist you by his Holy Spirit, that you may come short of it in nothing, but "be lights" to all around you, and "salt" that shall keep all, who come in contact with you, from corruption. If ye profess to believe in Christ, and have a "hope in him," see that ye follow him in all things, and "purify yourselves, even as He is pure."]

OUTLINE NO. 1796

HEATHENISH AND CHRISTIAN ZEAL COMPARED.

Acts xix. 34. *All with one voice, about the space of two hours, cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians!*

THE enmity of the human heart against God may sleep; but it is soon awakened, and called forth into action. St. Paul had continued two years at Ephesus, if not unmolested, yet protected by the power of God. But when his labours there were just finished, and he had sent away two of his attendants into Macedonia, with an intention speedily to follow them, it pleased God to withdraw from the people those restraints which he had hitherto imposed upon them, and to leave them to shew what was in their hearts. Accordingly the workmen "who made silver shrines for Diana," finding their trade lessened by the prevalence of Christianity, raised a tumult throughout the whole city, and would probably have killed Paul, if they could have laid their hands on him. In opposition to him and his doctrine, they exalted the object of their own worship, crying with one voice for the space of two hours, Great is Diana of the Ephesians!

From this circumstance we shall take occasion to notice,

I. The zeal they manifested—

This doubtless was great; but it was,

1. Blind—

[Who was Diana? What had she done for them? What could a senseless image do for them? Or what difference would there be in the power of that image, whether it was made with hands, or fell down (as they foolishly supposed) from Jupiter, who himself was only a creature of their vain imaginations? Yet for the honour of this idol are they transported beyond all bounds of sense and reason: and when Alexander beckoned to them with his hand, in order to engage their attention to what he had to say to them on the subject, they would not listen to him for a moment, but for the space of two hours cried out all together, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" We wonder at the extreme blindness of these benighted heathens: but amongst Christians there are very many who can give no better reason for the hope that is in them, or for the religion they profess, than those could who were so zealous for the honour of Diana.]

2. Interested—

[Demetrius, and the workmen of the like occupation with himself, pretended not to regard their gains, or at least not to account them as any thing in comparison of their religion: but it is manifest, that a concern for their temporal interest was the real source of all their disquiet: and, had their gains been increased by the introduction of Christianity, instead of being diminished, they would have left to others the task of vindicating the honour of their goddess[a]. Now this gives us an insight into all the different religions that obtain in the world, not excepting even Christianity itself, as it has been debased by the great majority of its adherents. They are all founded in priestcraft. Men, with a view of exalting themselves, and advancing their own interests, have invented gods and goddesses, and ceremonies by which they were to be worshipped; and have prevailed upon their fellow-countrymen to adopt their cunningly-devised fables: and, having once gained an ascendant over the minds of others, they have contrived to inspire them with reverence and zeal for the systems thus promulged, and to secure to themselves thereby a permanent support. Hence the priests have uniformly opposed all who have attempted to rectify the errors of the people: and this is the true reason of Popery having taken so deep a root in the minds of men: the Pope and the subordinate priests find their account in upholding all the superstitions with which they have obscured the Christian faith; and the people, deluded and kept

[a] See ver. 25, 27.

in bondage by them, are as zealous for those superstitions, as for the most important doctrines of their religion. Happy would it be if Protestant Churches also were not chargeable with the same evils: but truth compels us to acknowledge, that the fire which burns upon our Christian altars would soon languish, if it were not supplied with fuel by temporal honours and emoluments. It must be remembered, however, that the zeal which is founded in self-interest, is worthless, and even hateful in the sight of God.]

3. Infuriate—

[The people were "full of wrath," and acted more like maniacs than rational beings. "The whole city was filled with confusion;" "some cried one thing, and some another;" and "the greater part of the assembly knew not wherefore they were come together." In what a ferment must their minds be that they could continue for two hours that senseless cry, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" We read of the worshippers of Baal crying from the morning to the evening sacrifice, "O Baal, hear us!" and because he gave them no answer, "they cut themselves with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out." In such instances as these we see, in most striking colours, the nature and effects of superstition: it debases men almost to a level with the beasts, in the ferocity of their dispositions and the absurdity of their actions: so justly does the Apostle designate its votaries "*as unreasonable and wicked men.*"]

In perfect contrast with this is,

II. The zeal which Christianity requires—

True religion must be accompanied with zeal; with a zeal proportioned, in some measure, to its supreme excellence. But Christian zeal must be,

1. Founded in knowledge—

[We should know wherein the superiority of our religion consists: we should be acquainted with its mysterious truths, and, above all, with that which constitutes its peculiar excellence—the mystery of redemption. We should see the wisdom and goodness, the love and mercy, yea, and every perfection, of the Deity, as displayed in that stupendous mystery — — — We should see its suitableness to our wants, and its sufficiency for our necessities — — — It is from such views of it alone that true zeal will spring; or that we shall ever be led to "count all things but dung for the excellency of the knowledge of it."]

2. Regulated by love—

[True zeal should have respect only to the good of men, and the glory of God. It should be divested of all selfish

interests, and carnal passions. Self should have no concern whatever in it, any farther than the advancement of our own spiritual and eternal welfare may be comprehended under that term. In all its actings it must be regulated by a tender regard to the weaknesses and prejudices of men. It is by no means sufficient that we endeavour to approve ourselves *zealous* for God, unless we approve ourselves at the same time patient and forbearing towards men; proportioning our exertions for their welfare to their capacity for receiving our instructions; or, in other words, being content to administer milk alone to those who are not able to digest strong meat; and, like Moses, to put a veil upon our face, when the lustre of our countenance would be too strong for those who look to us for the words of life. Never should we needlessly cast a stumbling-block in the way of any, or use our own liberty in such a way as to offend our weaker brethren. Our aim should be, to "win souls" to Christ: and for that end we should, as far as we conscientiously can, "become all things to all men, that by all means we may save some."]

3. Tempered with discretion—

["It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing:" but there is "a zeal which is not according to knowledge." To exercise zeal aright, we should consider with care and circumspection the following things: first, *Our own office and character;* not invading the provinces of others, or assuming to ourselves a character which belongs not to us. It is not every one that has a right to act as Phinehas did, in executing vengeance upon offenders with his own hand: (Phinehas was himself a ruler, and acted under the orders of the supreme magistrate: and he is commended, not so much for punishing the offenders, as for daring to punish them in the face of all Israel, whilst thousands of others were guilty of the same offence.) Nor can I conceive it at all right for persons uneducated, and uncalled, to invade the ministerial office, (as is so common in this day,) when we are expressly told, that "no man should take this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron; and that even Christ glorified not himself to be made an high-priest, but was called to the office by Him who said to him, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee[b]."

Next, we should consider *The nature of the thing about which our zeal is exercised.* We should distinguish between things essential and non-essential. It would be a sad perversion of zeal to shew the same earnestness about "tithes of mint, anise, and cummin, as about the weightier matters of the law, judg-

[b] Heb. v. 4, 5. and Jam. iii. 1. in the Greek: διδάσκαλοι, 'teachers.'

ment, mercy, and truth." We mean not to say, that *any* truth, or *any* duty, is of small moment; but we affirm, that there is a vast distance between some truths or duties, and others; and that consequently there should be a proportionate difference between the zeal we exercise in relation to them. St. Paul "became to the weak, as weak; and to them that were without law as without law:" he even circumcised Timothy, though he knew that the rite of circumcision was abrogated: but when the circumcision of Titus was required as necessary, he would not give place, no, not for an hour; but declared, that if even an angel from heaven should insist upon the works of the law as necessary to salvation, he should, and must, be accursed. The same sentiment applies to those doctrines of our religion which are less clearly revealed, and about which the best of men may differ; as also to those matters which relate to Church government, respecting which there is a great diversity of opinion amongst men of equal piety and learning. We should insist upon them, not in proportion to the interests or prejudices of any particular party, but according to the stress laid upon them in the Holy Scriptures; always distinguishing between what is clear or doubtful, essential or non-essential.

There is yet another thing proper for us to consider, namely, *The best means of attaining our end.* Nothing is further from Christian simplicity than artifice of any kind. We must never attempt to "catch any man with guile." But there is an address, "a becoming all things to all men," which we shall do well to cultivate. As in warfare it often happens that an enemy is induced by the skilful motions of his adversary to relinquish a post from which he could not have been driven by a direct attack, so, in seeking to benefit mankind, much may depend on the manner in which our efforts are conducted. We know full well, that success is of God alone; but we know also that he makes use of means suited to the end, and that he requires us to "walk in wisdom toward them that are without," and to "give no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed."]

We will conclude this subject with one or two DIRECTIONS proper for the occasion:

1. Let your zeal begin at home—

[A man's own heart is the first sphere for the exercise of zeal. To get a deeply penitent and contrite heart is an object worthy of our utmost exertions. Zeal in relation to this is expressly enjoined by our Lord himself, who could not endure the lukewarmness of the Laodicean Church[c]: and the diversified actings of that zeal are accurately described in the account

[c] Rev. iii. 19.

given us of the Corinthian Church[d]. To devote ourselves also unreservedly to God is another exercise of zeal which deserves our earliest attention. The mortifying of every lust, the cultivating of every gracious affection, and the getting of "our whole man, body, soul, and spirit, sanctified unto the Lord[e]," *this*, *this* should be a prelude to our exertions in behalf of others: we should "first pluck the beam out of our own eye, before we attempt to pull out the mote that is in our brother's eye." I do not mean that we are to forbear doing any thing for God till we ourselves are perfect (for then we shall never exert ourselves for him at all): but we should make our first and main efforts on our own corruptions, that we may teach others by our example, as well as by our precepts.]

2. Let it be extended to all around you—

[Every man may find abundant scope for his labours in his own immediate neighbourhood: in visiting the sick, instructing the ignorant, relieving the sick, and comforting the afflicted. But some are called to more extensive spheres of usefulness: magistrates and ministers have a greater scope afforded them for benefiting the world. And O, how loudly do the heathen nations call upon us for the exercise of zeal! How many in every country under heaven are saying to us, "Come over to Macedonia, and help us!" Now the office of zeal is to overlook our own ease and interests, and to find our happiness in serving God: but, alas! how little of this zeal is to be found amongst us! How few, when God is wanting ambassadors to distant climes, are ready to say, "Here am I; send me." This is much to the shame of the Christian world. Our Lord tells us of ungodly men that would "compass sea and land to make one proselyte" to human opinions, and we are backward to use such exertions for the conversion of multitudes to the faith of Christ. Ah! let us wipe off this reproach; and labour, all of us in our respective spheres, and according to our abilities, to promote the salvation of our fellow-men, and to advance the kingdom of Christ to the utmost ends of the earth.]

[d] 2 Cor. vii. 11. [e] Rom. xii. 1, 11. Eccl. ix. 10.

OUTLINE NO. 1797

PAUL'S SERMON AT TROAS.

Acts xx. 7. *And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.*

IF we look at Christianity as it exists at this day, it appears little else than a name, and a form: but if we contemplate it as it existed in the apostolic age, it will be found an active and invigorating principle in the minds of men, engaging all their affections, and stimulating them to the greatest exertions. As for St. Paul's labours for the propagation of the Gospel in the world, we forbear to speak of them at present, any farther than they are connected with the passage which is immediately before us: but his preaching from evening to midnight, and then continuing his discourse afterwards till break of day, will give us some idea of the exertions he made in the cause of Christ, and of the interest which his hearers also felt in all that related to their Christian course.

The account given of his discourse, will lead us to notice,

I. The proper employment of the Sabbath—

The Jewish Sabbath was appointed by God himself to be spent in holy exercises. On it the sacrifices were twice as numerous as on other days; and the law of Moses was read for the instruction of the people. But under the Christian dispensation, the time of its observance was changed from the seventh day of the week to the first; in commemoration of the resurrection of our blessed Lord, and of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. It is probable that, for a considerable time, the seventh day still continued to be observed by those who were proselyted from the Jewish religion, lest their neglect of that day should put a stumbling-block in the way of their brethren: but the first day was that which from the beginning was held sacred by the early Christians; and it was dignified with the peculiar title of the "Lord's-day[a]." On this day the Church at Troas were assembled, to offer unto God their accustomed sacrifices of prayer and praise, and particularly "to break bread," that is, to commemorate the death of Christ agreeably to the directions given by our

[a] Compare 1 Cor. xvi. 2. with Rev. i. 10.

Lord himself on the night previous to his crucifixion. This ordinance constituted an essential part of the service on every Lord's-day: it called the attention of the Church to that great mystery which was the foundation of all their hopes, even to the body of Christ as broken for them, and the blood of Christ as shed for them. Moreover, it led them to apply to Christ by faith for a continued interest in his death, and a more abundant communication of his blessing to their souls.

Amongst us, the Lord's Supper is not administered so often; but our employment on the Sabbath ought to be, in fact, the same: it should consist in these two things:

1. A personal intercourse with Christ as dying for us—

[In entering into the house of prayer, we come, it is true, to worship the Father; but we must never forget that it is only in and through Christ that we can have access to him; and that every prayer must be offered to the Father in the name of Christ — — — We assemble, too, to hear the word of God; but it is *the Gospel*, the glad tidings of salvation through a crucified Redeemer, that we must desire to hear: and the faithful minister will "determine to know nothing among his people, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified." If he preach the law, it will be as "a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ:" or if he insist upon any particular duty, it will be, not to lead his hearers to establish a righteousness of their own by their obedience to it, but to shew them how they are to manifest the sincerity of their faith, and how they are to glorify their God and Saviour — — — Both minister and people must remember, that they meet, not as Mahometans, who acknowledge one God; not as Jews, who confess their obligation to obey his revealed will; but *as Christians*, who have their hopes fixed entirely on Christ, and expect every thing as the purchase of his blood. Whether the Lord's Supper is administered or not, "Christ is to be evidently set forth crucified before us;" and "to know him," "to win him," "to be found in him;" and "to receive out of his fulness," must be the great object of our assembling together — — —]

2. A personal surrender of ourselves to him, as his redeemed people—

[When the first Christians met thus constantly "to break bread," they confessed openly, that they were disciples of that

crucified Saviour; and they engaged themselves, as it were by a solemn oath, to live and die in his service. Thus do we profess, in all our solemn acts of worship, that we have been "bought with a price," even with the inestimable price of the Redeemer's blood; and that we are bound, by every possible tie, "to glorify him with our bodies and our spirits which are his" — — — We do not in general associate this idea with any thing but the Lord's supper; but we ought to associate it with all the services of the Sabbath; and to consider ourselves as living thus upon Christ by the renewed exercises of faith, in order that we may live to Christ in the more enlarged exercise of holy obedience — — —]

Let us now proceed to notice,

II. The particular circumstances of that meeting—

The place where they were assembled was an upper chamber—

[It was a room three stories high, and so small and crowded, that the windows, even at night, were forced to be open for the admission of air, whilst some were constrained to sit in them for want of more convenient accommodation. Little do we think what a blessing it is to us that we have houses built on purpose for the service of our God. True it is that even in them the poor do not always find such commodious seats as one could wish: but, if there were no other places for our reception than such as they possessed at Troas, we fear that multitudes who now receive instruction from Sabbath to Sabbath, would never trouble themselves to seek it, where they must submit to so much inconvenience for the attainment of it.]

In that room, there were "many lights"—

[The enemies of the Church were ready to raise all manner of evil reports against the Disciples; and they would gladly have represented these nocturnal meetings as scenes of much iniquity. To cut off all occasion for such calumnies, the Disciples took care to have the place of their assemblies well lighted in every part; and it is probable that it was for the express purpose of obviating all such remarks, that the historian recorded this otherwise unimportant fact. It teaches us, however, that we should be always on our "guard against even the appearance of evil," and "cut off occasion from them that seek occasion" against us, and "not let our good be evil spoken of."]

There Paul preached his farewell discourse—

[At what precise hour he began, we know not; but "he continued his discourse till midnight;" and after a short interruption, resumed it "till break of day." Do we wonder that

he should so long detain his audience? No: the occasion was very peculiar; "he was about to depart on the morrow," never probably to see their face again: his heart was full; the subject was inexhaustible: the hearts of his audience were deeply impressed, and they drank in the word with insatiable avidity. What a glorious meeting must that have been; the preacher so animated with his subject, and the people so penetrated with the truths they heard! Doubtless, it would not be expedient, under common circumstances, so to lengthen out the service of our God; but, if we could always meet under similar impressions, and have our hearts so engaged, how glorious would be the ordinances, and how exalted the benefit arising from them!]

A distressing occurrence, which for a time interrupted his discourse, tended ultimately to impress it more deeply on their minds—

[A youth, named Eutychus, being overcome with sleep, "fell down out of the window from the third loft, and was taken up dead." O, what grief must have seized the whole assembly! — — — but the Apostle went down to him, and fell upon him, as Elijah and Elisha had done upon the persons they had raised to life, and by prayer to God prevailed for the restoration of his life. At the sight of this "they were not a little comforted." As it respected the youth, it would have been most distressing to think that he should be taken into the eternal world in such a state; as though he had been made, like Lot's wife, a warning to all future generations. But more especially were they concerned for the honour of God and his Gospel. What a stumbling-block would it have been to the ungodly, that such an accident should have been occasioned by the unreasonable length of the Apostle's discourse! How bitterly would they have inveighed against him, and against these meetings that were encouraged by him! Truly it was no little joy to have such great occasions of offence removed. But further, the miracle thus wrought before their eyes, was a striking confirmation of what they had heard: it was, as it were, *a seal* put by God himself to attest the truth of all that had been delivered to them, and *an emblem*, yea, *a pledge* and *earnest* also, of the blessings which all who received his Gospel might expect at his hands. Thus was this occurrence, so afflictive in itself, overruled for the furtherance of their joy, and for the more abundant display of God's grace and mercy.]

As an IMPROVEMENT of this subject, let us see,

1. How deep an interest we should take in the Gospel of Christ!

[It is much to be regretted that we see but little of this fervour in our religious assemblies: neither we who minister, nor you who hear, are affected with the Gospel in any measure as we ought to be. In many congregations there may be found persons sleeping, like Eutychus, though the sermon be not an hour long: and where they are not actually asleep, how many hear in such a drowsy, listless, inattentive manner, that they evidently take no interest in the subject, nor could give any good account of what has been spoken to them. O brethren, let it not be so with us. Let us rather come together as that assembly did; I to preach, and you to hear, as though we were never to meet again in this world. The subjects of the Apostle's discourse are as important to us, as they were to the primitive Christians: let us beg of God to impress them more deeply on our minds, that they may be to us "a savour of life unto life," and not, as they are to too many, "a savour of death unto death."]

2. How earnestly we should improve our present intercourse with each other!

[It is but a little while, at all events, that our present connexion can be continued: I must soon go to give an account of my ministry, as you also must to answer for the way in which you have improved it: and even from Sabbath to Sabbath we know not whether the present opportunity shall not be our last. Surely this thought should make us exceeding anxious to obtain increasing edification in faith and love, that so "I may be your rejoicing, and you be mine, in the great day of the Lord Jesus."]

OUTLINE NO. 1798

ST. PAUL'S APPEAL TO THE ELDERS OF EPHESUS.

Acts xx. 17—21. *And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons. Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*

IT is to peculiar, and, if we may so speak, to accidental circumstances, that we are indebted for

that full developement of St. Paul's character which we have in the Holy Scriptures. He never willingly set about to commend himself; but he was sometimes compelled to vindicate himself against the accusations of his enemies, and to make known his own principles and conduct, in order to prevail on others to tread in his steps. It was with this latter view that he made his appeal to the elders of Ephesus, when he was about to take a last farewell of them at Miletus.

Let us consider,

I. The appeal he made to them—

His stay among them had been of three years' continuance; so that during that time they had had abundant opportunities of knowing every thing respecting him. To them therefore he appealed respecting,

1. The exercises of his mind—

[He had "served the Lord with all *humility of mind*," conscious of his own utter insufficiency for so great a work as had been committed to him[a], and willing to make himself the servant of all, if by any means he might promote their eternal welfare[b] — — — With this humility of mind he had blended *compassion for their souls;* so that whether he thought of those who rejected the Gospel, or those who walked unworthy of it, he had wept much on their account, both in his addresses to them, and in his supplications in their behalf[c] — — — Moreover, he had *persevered in his efforts* for their good, notwithstanding such difficulties, as had often proved a severe trial to his faith and patience[d] — — —[e]]

2. The labours of his life—

[He had exerted himself for them with *fidelity* and *diligence:* in all his communications, consulting, not what might

[a] 2 Cor. ii. 16. [b] 2 Cor. iv. 5. and 1 Cor. ix. 19.
[c] Rom. ix. 2. Phil. iii. 18. 2 Cor. ii. 4.
[d] ver. 3. and Acts xiii. 50, 51. xiv. 5, 6, 19, 20. and xvii. 5.
[e] This subject should be differently enlarged upon, according to the occasion on which it should be delivered. If it were a *Visitation* or *Ordination* Sermon, the duties of the Ministry should be inculcated agreeably to this model: if it were a *Funeral* Sermon, the character of the deceased, as far as it accorded with this pattern, might be set forth: or, if it were a *Farewell* Sermon, a similar appeal might be made by the preacher, as far as it might be done with truth.

please, but what would "profit them:" and delivering to them his sentiments, not merely in public addresses, but privately and personally in their own houses, whenever an occasion offered — — —]

3. The subject of his ministrations—

[He had never entertained them with unprofitable speculations, but had uniformly endeavoured to instruct them in the two great fundamental doctrines of Christianity, "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." These he inculcated on all, whether they were self-righteous Jews, or philosophizing and contemptuous Gentiles: he inculcated these things, I say, on all, as being equally necessary, and equally sufficient, for all the human race — — —]

As the making of such an appeal to them may, to a superficial observer, appear to savour of pride, let us consider,

II. The end for which he made it—

We may be well assured that he sought not to advance his own glory: no; he had higher ends in view: he endeavoured to SHEW them,

1. How much they were indebted to God for the privileges they had enjoyed—

[To have such a ministry of the word so long continued to them, was a greater blessing than to be loaded with all the temporal benefits that could have been bestowed upon them. By means of his ministry, vast multitudes had been "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God:" now therefore that they were about to be deprived of those blessings, it became them, not so much to grieve at the loss they were to sustain, as to adore God for the benefits they had enjoyed. In reviewing his labours amongst them for the space of three years, they would see how greatly they were indebted to God above other cities, which had enjoyed only a transient visit of a few days or weeks; and would feel themselves bound to render to the Lord, according to the benefits he had conferred upon them — — —]

2. How carefully they should guard against departing from the faith—

[Notwithstanding all the instructions they had received, they might, and would, if left to themselves, depart from God. St. Paul knew, that, "after his departure, grievous wolves would enter in among them;" and that "even from among themselves men would arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." This, alas! is what frequently

takes place at the removal of a faithful minister, unless there be substituted in his place an Elisha, on whom the mantle of Elijah has fallen. When Moses was on the mount only forty days, the people, even with Aaron at their head, departed from the Lord, and made a golden calf. What then must not be expected, where the bereavement is of long continuance, and the people are left without any such distinguished saint to superintend and controul them? — — — O let all of you take care, "lest any root of bitterness spring up and trouble you, and thereby many be defiled!" — — —]

3. How earnestly they should strive to promote the interests of the Church—

[These elders were the same as in a subsequent verse are called "overseers," or bishops; and, as their peculiar duty called them "to feed the Church of God," he charged them to "take heed both to themselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost had placed them," even that Church, which our incarnate "God had purchased with his own blood." What weighty considerations does he here urge, to stimulate them to a diligent discharge of their high office! O that every minister felt their full influence, and were actuated by them in the whole of his conduct!

But we must not suppose that ministers alone are interested in this charge: for every member of a Church may do much towards the establishment of his brethren in faith, and love, and holiness. All should watch over one another for good; and this duty is still more imperative, when a faithful pastor is removed, and scope is thereby afforded for the entrance of contentious persons to distract and divide the Church — — —[f]]

[f] The course of discussion in this Sermon depending so entirely on the occasion on which it should be used, little more is afforded to the reader, than an outline, to be filled up as the occasion may require.

OUTLINE NO. 1799

DUTY OF MINISTERS.

Acts xx. 24. *But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.*

OF all the employments under heaven, there is not one so honourable or so useful as that in which the ministers of the Gospel have the happiness to be engaged. The government of kingdoms has respect

only to the things of time; whereas the ministry of the Gospel, both in its ordination by God, and its exercise by men, refers altogether to the concerns of eternity. We mean not to depreciate other offices; or to place the common office of a pastor on a footing with that of a Prophet or an Apostle: but still we must be permitted to "magnify our office" beyond that of any earthly magistrate, as far as things visible and temporal are excelled by things invisible and eternal.

But the trials with which a faithful discharge of our duty is attended are proportionably great. Fallen man does not like to be reclaimed: he wishes to banish God from his thoughts. If warned of his guilt and danger, he is indignant; and says to us, "Prophesy unto us smooth things; prophesy deceits; and make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us." From the days of Cain, even to the present hour, has the exercise of vital godliness been an occasion of offence: and the more the Divine authority has been asserted, the more offence has been given to an ungodly world. Hence Prophets and Apostles have all, in their respective ages, fallen a sacrifice to their fidelity. St. Paul, at his first appointment to the apostolic office, was told what great things he should suffer for the Lord's sake; and his trials far exceeded those of any other Apostle: but, in a review of all that he had endured, and in the prospect of all that he was yet taught to expect, he could say, "None of these things move me," &c.

From these words I shall take occasion to shew,

I. What is the office of a minister—

The office of every minister is, "to testify the Gospel of the grace of God."

This was the one employment of the Apostle—

[He proclaimed, with all fidelity, "the Gospel" of Christ, or, in other words, the salvation which the Lord Jesus Christ has wrought out for us by his own obedience unto death ——— This he proclaimed to be altogether "of grace," in the first appointment of the Lord Jesus to be a Mediator between God and man; in the acceptance of his sacrifice as an

expiation for sin; in the bestowment of faith on the individuals of mankind; and in the completion of the work in the souls of all that shall be saved. From the beginning to the end, in all its parts, this salvation was traced by him to the free and sovereign grace of God — — — Of these things, also, he "testified with much contention." He was constantly opposed by Judaizing teachers on the one hand, and by conceited philosophers on the other; and he was constrained to exert himself with all earnestness, in order that the truth of the Gospel might be fully known, and be established on the firmest basis. The Epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians are the best comment on these words; and must fully evince the energy with which the Apostle maintained his testimony, whether against dissembling friends or violent opponents.]

This, also, is the employment of every faithful minister—

[To make known the way of salvation is the very end for which ministers are ordained. They come as heralds of the Most High God, to proclaim mercy to a ruined world, through the vicarious sacrifice of the Son of God — — — But against the testimony of a faithful minister all the prejudices and passions of mankind will rise; and he will be constrained to maintain his ground by a constant appeal to Holy Writ, as the only standard of truth, and the only arbiter that is competent to decide the controversy. In his disputations he must be firm, in order to support the honour of his God, whose grace alone must be exalted from first to last. If an angel from heaven were to broach a doctrine which derogated from this, he must withstand him to the face, and pronounce him accursed[a]. Whatever truths he may have occasion to bring forward, he must always mark their bearing upon the doctrines of grace; shewing how they lead to those doctrines, or arise out of them; that so the truth of the Gospel may be kept inviolate, and "Christ may be exalted as all in all[b]." In a word, he must determine, throughout the whole of his testimony, to "know nothing, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified[c]."]

Whilst in this passage we see what the ministerial office is, we behold also,

II. How it is to be discharged—

We have reason to be thankful for the trials he sustained; since they drew forth from him a full statement of his feelings in relation to them. From

[a] Gal. i. 8, 9. [b] Col. iii. 11. [c] 1 Cor. ii. 1, 2.

his example we learn, that this testimony must be borne,

1. With undaunted firmness—

[Never was there a faithful servant of God who was not persecuted for righteousness' sake. If bonds and imprisonments do not await the pious minister at this day, it is not because he is less an object of hatred now than formerly, but because he is better protected by the laws of the land. The men who build the sepulchres of departed saints are as ready as ever to persecute the living ones, if only the restraints imposed upon them were withdrawn. The continuance of the inquisition amongst Catholics sufficiently shews what ungodly hypocrites would yet do, if they had it in their power. But the servant of God must be ready to encounter every danger: he must die daily, in the habit of his mind; and be ready to lay down his life, at any time, and in any manner, for his Master's sake. "He must make no account[d]" either of labours or of sufferings, if only he may approve himself to God, and be serviceable to the souls of his fellow-creatures — — —]

2. With inflexible perseverance—

[Never must he cease from his labours, as long as he has strength to follow them. He has begun a course, which must never end but with life itself. He has received a commission from his Lord; and to the Lord he must give account of the manner in which it has been executed. Never must he be "weary in well-doing." St. Paul, when stoned and left for dead, was no sooner, as by miracle, restored to life, than he resumed his work, and prosecuted his labours with all his former intrepidity. He had respect to the account which he must speedily give at the judgment-seat of Christ; and he determined, through grace, that he would give it with joy, and not with grief. So must every minister have the blood of his people required at his hands: and he must so acquit himself in his labours for them, that, if he save not them, he may at least deliver his own soul.]

For an IMPROVEMENT of this subject, let us follow it up,

1. In a way of inquiry—

[If *we* are to bear our testimony with fidelity, *you* are to receive it with the simplicity of little children. But have we not reason to complain with the prophet, "Lord, who hath believed our report?" I know, indeed, that many receive it with outward approbation: but who amongst you accounts it

[d] See the Greek.

more precious than life itself? If received aright, all things will be counted but as dung and dross in comparison of it. If received aright, it will be obeyed: your course of life will be directed by it: and you will be standing ready to give up your account to him, whose word it is, and whose salvation is proclaimed unto you. O! deceive not yourselves with a mere profession of faith in Christ; but give yourselves up altogether to him: and make him "all your salvation, and all your desire."]

2. In a way of encouragement—

[Once more we bear our testimony before you; and declare, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Saviour, the only Saviour, of the world. Once more we declare, that his salvation is free for all; as free as the light we see, or the air we breathe. The grace of God, as revealed in it is exceeding abundant; insomuch that, "where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound," if only ye be willing to accept it as the gift of sovereign love and mercy. Do not, I pray you, place the smallest reliance on any thing of your own: for I testify to every one amongst you, that if you attempt to blend any thing of your own with the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ, you will make void the grace of God, and render Christ himself of no effect. "This is the record of God which we are commissioned to proclaim, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son: he that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life." Receive this record, and all will be well: reject it, and you must inevitably perish: for "there is no other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved, but the adorable name of Jesus Christ." If an adherence to Christ expose you to difficulties, be it so: and be content to bear the cross for his sake: but if, through the fear of man, ye deny Christ, know that he will deny you before the whole universe at his tribunal. "If, on the contrary, ye suffer with him, fear not but that ye shall be also glorified together."]

OUTLINE NO. 1800

MINISTERIAL FIDELITY.

Acts xx. 26, 27. *I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.*

NO one can be conceived more averse to egotism than was the Apostle Paul. Yet, on some occasions,

he felt it necessary, for the vindication of his own character, to assert what was true, even though the assertion did tend to place his actions in a more favourable point of view than he would have wished to place them, if such a necessity had not existed. Nor was it only when impelled by necessity that he so acted. There were occasions whereon a regard for the souls of men induced him to refer to his own feelings and proceedings towards them, that so he might the more deeply interest them in that line of conduct which he prescribed; and which would issue in their own eternal welfare. Such were the circumstances under which he made the appeal before us. He was addressing the elders of the Ephesian Church, whom he had sent for to Miletus, and whom he knew that he should never behold again in this world. He therefore reminded them how he had conducted himself amongst them; that so he might engage them, after his departure, to tread in his steps. The words which I have just read refer to the *Ministerial fidelity* which he had exercised towards them, and to the satisfaction with which, in the prospect of the future judgment, he looked back upon it; since he had a testimony in his own conscience, and in their consciences also, that, whatever might eventually be the effect of it with respect to them, "he was pure from their blood."

In opening the subject of *Ministerial fidelity*, I will shew,

I. Wherein it consists—

The Apostle sums it up in this one expression: "I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God."

"The counsel of God" is that which he has revealed in the Gospel of his Son—

[It is elsewhere called "the word of reconciliation; namely, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them[a]." This, of course, comprehends all that relates to our fall in Adam, and

[a] 2 Cor. v. 19.

our recovery in Christ. The whole of our guilt, both original and actual, must be stated; and so stated, as that every one may be made sensible of his lost condition, and of the utter impossibility of ever restoring himself to the Divine favour. The law must be set forth in its spirituality, and with its penal sanctions, that is, as requiring perfect and perpetual obedience, and as denouncing its irrevocable sentence of condemnation for one single transgression[b]. The plan which God, of his infinite mercy has devised for the satisfying of his justice and the honouring of his law, must then be opened. His gift of his only dear Son, to take our nature upon him, and in that nature to fulfil the law for us; enduring in his own person all its righteous penalties, and obeying to the uttermost all its holy demands; his gift of his Son, I say, thus to work out a righteousness for us, a righteousness fully commensurate with all the demands, whether of law or justice, and, by imputation made available for our restoration to his favour; *this*, I say, must be declared as the method devised by God for the salvation of the world — — — But it is not for our restoration to *his favour* merely, that he has devised this plan; but for our restoration to *his image*. And here must be opened the indispensable necessity of mortifying all sin through the influences of the Holy Spirit, and of devoting ourselves wholly and entirely to God — — —]

"The whole" of this must be set forth from time to time—

[It must be declared *plainly, without disguise; fully, without concealment; firmly, without doubt; authoritatively, without fear*. It is not to be wrapt up in polished language, for the sake of pleasing a fastidious ear; but to be opened in the simplest terms, or, as the Apostle says, "Not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual[c]." Nor must there be any bias in our minds towards any one part of the system above another; to doctrines above duties, or to duties above doctrines; every truth that is revealed in the Scripture must be brought forth in its place, and have that measure of prominence in our statements which it bears in the sacred volume. On points of dubious aspect we may express ourselves with doubt; but on all the great leading features of redemption we should express no more doubt than on the most self-evident truth that can be subjected to our view. In delivering these truths, also, we should "speak as the oracles of God[d]," even as "Ambassadors from God, in whose place we stand," and whose word we deliver[e].]

[b] Gal. iii. 10. [c] 1 Cor. i. 17. and ii. 4, 13.
[d] 1 Pet. iv. 11. [e] 2 Cor. v. 20. 1 Thess. ii. 13. and iv. 8.

When the Apostle says that he "had not shunned" to exercise this fidelity, he strongly intimates,

II. The difficulty of maintaining it—

Such statements as these are very offensive to the pride of man—

[Man is ready to conceive of himself as not *very* sinful, and not deserving of any great measure of punishment. He hopes, too, that he has within himself a sufficiency of wisdom to discern his duty, and of resolution and strength to perform it. He trusts also, that, by executing his own purposes at the time that he shall find convenient to do so, he shall reconcile himself to God, and obtain favour in his sight. But the Gospel brings down at once all these towering imaginations, and reduces every child of man to a level with publicans and harlots; so far, at least, as to make them "renounce all confidence in the flesh[f]," and seek for mercy simply through faith in Christ. It pronounces every man "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked[g];" and counsels him to seek in "Christ alone, his wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption[h]." Nor is the holiness which the Gospel requires a whit less offensive to the worldly man, than its humiliating doctrines are to the self-righteous. When we say to him, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world: for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world[i];" and when we require him to "be crucified to the world by the cross of Christ[k];" we seem to him as exacting far too much, and as shutting heaven against all but a few gloomy enthusiasts.]

Nor does any one ever make this stand for God with impunity—

[Look back to the days of old, and see which of the prophets was not persecuted by the people to whom he ministered[l]. And who amongst the Apostles escaped the rage of their indignant enemies? Even our blessed Lord, who "spake as never man spake," and wrought such numberless miracles in confirmation of his word, was hated and persecuted even unto death. He tells us, "The world hateth me, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil[m]." And see, in the present day, whether there be not the same enmity evinced against his faithful servants as in the days of old? See whether *ministerial fidelity* do not uniformly subject a man to

[f] Phil. iii. 3. [g] Rev. iii. 18, 19. [h] 1 Cor. i. 30.
[i] 1 John ii. 15, 16. [k] Gal. vi. 14. [l] Acts vii. 52.
[m] John vii. 7.

hatred, and reproach, and persecution, in every place, and every age. It matters not how blameless a man is in the whole of his conversation, or how benevolent in the whole of his conduct; hated he will be, yea, and despised and persecuted too, if he be faithful to his God, and to the souls of men. Men will account him "their enemy, if he tell them the truth[n]:" and so universal is this effect, that "if a minister please men, he cannot be the servant of Jesus Christ[o]." If we would "speak unto them smooth things, and prophesy deceits, and in our life and conversation countenance their worldly habits, we might easily conciliate their regards:" "if we were of the world, the world would love its own:" but when we bear our testimony against the ways of men, we must expect them to say of us, "I hate Micaiah, because he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil[p]."

Now it must be supposed that we have our feelings as well as other men; and that it can be no pleasing thing for us to render ourselves objects of contempt and hatred to all around us: but we know what we have to expect: we know that "the servant cannot be above his lord; and that it is sufficient for him if he be treated as his lord[q]." But this plainly shews, that to maintain this fidelity is no easy matter; and that, if we consulted with flesh and blood, we should "*shun*" the office which is sure to entail upon us such painful consequences.]

The solemn appeal which the Apostle makes respecting his fidelity, leads us to notice,

III. The importance of it to the souls of men—

It is indeed of the utmost importance,

1. To those who are ministered unto—

[There is but one way by which any man can be saved; and that is the way which God has revealed to us in the Gospel. God, in his eternal counsels, "has laid a foundation for us in Zion[r]:" and "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ[s]." Whatever men may imagine, "there is salvation for us in no other: for there is no other name given under heaven whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ[t]." Now, if we conceal this way of salvation, or pervert it in any respect, either by adding to it or taking from it, we must of necessity mislead the people, and, as far as they depend on us, eternally ruin their souls. To have *such* a pastor, is their misfortune: but it will not be considered as any excuse for them. They have the sacred records in their hands; and if they studied them with dili-

[n] Gal. iv. 16. [o] Gal. i. 10. [p] 1 Kings xxii. 8.
[q] Matt. x. 24, 25. [r] Isai. xxviii. 16. [s] 1 Cor. iii. 11.
[t] Acts iv. 12.

gence, and earnestly sought instruction from God, they should "be guided into all truth," and "be made wise unto salvation." If, being themselves blind, they commit themselves to the guidance of the blind, they must participate in their leaders' fate, and with them "fall into the ditch[u]."]

2. To those who minister—

["God has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation;" and he has said, "He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully[x]." To us, also, he has committed the souls to whom we minister; and he will require an account of them from us, at the day of judgment. He has placed us as watchmen, who are to care for their souls, and to give them warning from him. "O Son of man," says he, "I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked man from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it, if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul[y]." On his own fidelity his everlasting salvation depends. It is with him as with a sentinel at the extremity of a camp. If the enemy come, and he give the alarm, whether the enemy prevail or not, he is blameless: but if he sleep upon his post, or neglect to give the alarm, he is amenable to his commander for every life that has been sacrificed, and his life must go as an atonement for his fault. If this be the case where a man is in the service of an earthly monarch, and where the bodily life only is concerned, how much more must it be so in the service of the Most High God, and where the eternal welfare of souls is committed to us! It is just; it is right that it should be so: and it is in vain to hope that we shall ever "save ourselves," if we be not faithful in our endeavours to "save them that hear us[z]."]

Address—

1. Those who have disregarded all the counsel that has been given them—

[To many our word has appeared only as "a cunningly-devised fable," and "an idle tale." But we call you to witness, yea, and can make our appeal to God also, that we have, according to our ability, "declared unto you the whole counsel of God." And, though we have met with our measure

[u] Matt. xv. 14.
[x] Jer. xxiii. 28.
[y] Ezek. xxxiii. 7—9.
[z] 1 Tim. iv. 16.

of discouragement, like others, we have never shrunk from our duty, or shunned to execute it to the very utmost of our power. On your own souls, therefore, must lie the guilt of neglecting God; or, as the Apostle expresses it, "Your blood must be upon your own heads: I am clean[a]." Yet God forbid that I should rest without further efforts for your salvation. God is not weary in waiting for you; neither would I be weary in laying before you his whole counsel. It is probable, indeed, that this may be the last time in which I shall ever behold the face of some amongst you: for though I should not be removed from you before another Sabbath, the probability is, that some *one* at least may be here present this day, with whom my next meeting will be at the bar of judgment. I beseech you, then, to think what an awful thing it will be to go to the judgment-seat of Christ with all your guilt upon you! Yet, if you remain impenitent and unbelieving, this must be your unhappy condition: you will "die in your sins," and endure the punishment of them to all eternity. Think me not harsh for asserting this: for, as St. Paul says, "How shall ye escape, if ye neglect so great salvation?" so St. Peter also appeals in like manner, "If judgment begin at the house of God, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God? If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear[b]? These appeals are very forcible, because they make you judges in your own cause. I ask, then, "What must your end be? and where will you appear at the last day?" If you will say, 'In heaven,' be it so: I would to God you might! But conscience is not so blind, but that it will remonstrate against such a confidence as that. Conscience will tell you, that, if you will not obey the Gospel, but will continue to "reject the counsel of God against yourselves," you will do it at your peril; you will do it to your ruin.]

2. Those who are disposed to follow the counsel of their God—

[Remember to follow "*the whole* of it," "without partiality and without hypocrisy[c]." The religious world are extremely apt to forget their duty in this respect. Some place all their piety in contending for doctrines, in opposition to morals; and others, in exalting morals, to the disparagement of doctrines. Some will take one set of doctrines; and others, a set which appear opposed to them: and both will think that they are doing God service, whilst they anathematize each other; as if religion consisted in the adoption of human creeds, rather than

[a] Acts xviii. 6. [b] 1 Pet. iv. 17, 18.
[c] 1 Tim. v. 21. Jam. iii. 17.

in the conversion of the soul to God. But let it not be thus with you. Let the word of God, and not the word of man, be your guide. Let every thing be received from him with the simplicity of little children. And if there be in his word things which you cannot understand, sit not in judgment upon them with unhallowed confidence; but spread them before the Lord, saying, "What I know not, teach thou me." You will bear me witness, that "the whole counsel of God has been declared to you;" nor has any thing ever been kept back from you, because it did not square with this or that system of man's device. Let every part of the inspired volume be treated in the same way by you. Never be afraid to trace every thing to the sovereign counsels of your God: and, on the other hand, never forget that your condemnation is, and will be, the work of your own hands, even as your salvation is of God alone. By yourselves, indeed, must salvation be wrought *instrumentally:* but, if you ever attain to it, you must say, "He that hath wrought us to the self-same thing, is God;" for it is altogether the fruit of his counsel, and the operation of his grace.]

OUTLINE NO. 1801

WATCHFULNESS RECOMMENDED.

Acts xx. 31. *Therefore watch, and remember, that, by the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.*

IT is, for the most part, a blessing to mankind that they cannot look into futurity: for, on the one hand, they would have their present enjoyments almost entirely destroyed by the prospect of future ills, while, on the other hand, a prospect of remote good would prove but a small alleviation of their present troubles. Nevertheless, from a wise foresight of probable and contingent events, the most incalculable benefits arise. St. Paul knew, by immediate revelation from God, that, after his departure, some would be found amongst the leading members of the Ephesian Church, who would labour to introduce divisions and dissensions among them: and the probability was, that, unless extraordinary watchfulness were maintained by the elders of that Church, the restless sectaries would succeed in their efforts: he therefore, in the

farewell discourse which he delivered to the elders at Miletus, put them on their guard; and thus, by forewarning them of their danger, contributed in a very high degree to the preservation of that Church in peace and purity.

From the caution contained in the words before us, we observe,

I. That to warn men of their danger is the kindest office of love—

[Will any one doubt whether it was an act of love in St. Paul to *warn* the Ephesians: to warn them *individually* as well as collectively; to warn them "by night and by day," *as often as he could gain access to them;* to warn them *with* such *earnestness* as scarcely ever to address them without floods of "tears;" to do this *incessantly*, for *three years together*, when there was perhaps no other Church with whom he made so long an abode? However his fidelity might have been represented *there*, *we* have no doubt of the source from whence it sprang. Shall it be thought harsh then and unkind in *us* to warn our hearers? Who would impute it to harshness, if a parent warned his child, when walking on the brink of an unseen precipice, or playing on the hole of an asp, or cockatrice den? "We know the terrors of the Lord; and *therefore* we persuade men." We know, that the soul that dies in an unregenerate state can never be admitted into the kingdom of heaven[a]: we know, that no person can be saved, who does not truly believe in Christ, and rely upon him *alone* for salvation[b]: we know, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." On these accounts we warn the unholy, the unbelieving, the unregenerate; and intreat them to flee from the wrath to come. If we appear earnest at any time, ought we to be blamed as too zealous, or needlessly severe? No: you have infinitely more reason to complain on account of our coldness and treachery, than on account of any excess in our fidelity and earnestness. What little zeal we do shew, should be esteemed the fruit of love. And, if we could follow you from the public ordinances to your respective houses, and there renew to you *separately*, and *with tears*, the warnings we have given you in public, we should perform to you the kindest office; and most approve ourselves the servants of Him, who wept over the murderous Jerusalem, and died for the salvation of a ruined world.]

To evince that such fidelity cannot under any circumstances be dispensed with, we observe,

[a] John iii. 3. [b] John iii. 18, 36. Phil. iii. 9.

II. That there are none so established, but they need to be put upon their guard—

[The persons warned by St. Paul, were not the low, the ignorant, the obscure, but the most distinguished persons in the Ephesian Church: they were the elders, who superintended and governed the Church, and had doubtless been appointed to their high office because of their superior attainments in piety and virtue. Who then are they that can claim an exemption from pastoral admonitions? Shall the rich? they perhaps, of all people in the world, most need to be put upon their guard, because their dangers are increased far beyond those of any other class[c]. Are those whose proficiency in knowledge or grace has raised them to eminence in the Church, exempt from danger? Look on David, or Solomon, or Peter, or Hymeneus and Philetus, or Demas, and then say whether any qualifications or attainments can place us beyond the reach of temptation; or whether there be a man in the universe to whom the exhortation in the text may not with great propriety be addressed? Be it known to you, that even St. Paul himself found it necessary to "keep under his body, and bring it into subjection, lest he should at last become a cast-away:" and therefore "what I say unto one I say unto all, Watch."]

It is of importance too to remember,

III. That the oftener we are warned, the more our responsibility is increased—

[The guilt contracted by the inhabitants of Bethsaida and Chorazin, far exceeded that of the idolatrous Tyrians or Sidonians, because they had disregarded the warnings given them by our blessed Lord: and the people of Capernaum, who had been exalted to heaven in their privileges, were cast down to hell for their abuse of them, and were doomed to a more awful condemnation than even Sodom or Gomorrha[d]. Our Lord told the Jews, that "if he had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin (comparatively): but that, after the warnings he had given them, they had no cloak for their sin." Precisely to the same effect is St. Paul's admonition in the text: he reminds the Ephesians how long and earnestly he had warned them; and from thence insinuates, that, if they be unwatchful, their guilt will be proportionably increased. And is not this rule of judging universally admitted and approved? Is it not in this way that we estimate the criminality of our fellow-creatures? Do we not always consider, that, the more earnestly the necessity of obedience

[c] Mark x. 25. [d] Matt. xi. 21—24.

has been pressed upon them, the more aggravated is their disobedience or neglect? Surely then we should "remember how many years we have been warned;" and expect, that "to whom much has been committed, of them will God require the more."]

APPLICATION—

[Let *believers* watch, "lest being led astray by the error of the wicked, or by their own deceitful lusts, they fall from their own steadfastness[e]" — — — Let *backsliders* also watch "lest being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin," they abandon themselves to wickedness or despair — — — Let *all* watch, lest being blinded by the god of this world, they become slaves to his dominion, and partakers of his misery — — —]

[e] 2 Pet. iii. 17.

OUTLINE NO. 1802

A FAREWELL DISCOURSE.

Acts xx. 32. *And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.*

THIS is one of the most affecting portions of Scripture that can be found in all the Book of God. In it, the Apostle is taking leave of the Ephesian elders, over whom he had watched for the space of three years, and whose face he knew that he should behold no more. He was able to appeal to them, that, during that whole period, he had ministered unto them with the utmost fidelity, and watched over them with all the tenderness of a loving parent. And now that he was parting from them, he warned them of the evils which he foresaw, not only as probable, but certain: for that, from amongst themselves, some would arise, to introduce dissensions and divisions among them, and to fill with tares the field which he had so carefully cultivated with the purest wheat. He could not continue always with them: he therefore now commended them to God, who alone was able to complete the work which had been begun in their souls.

In these words we see,

I. The desire of a minister for his people, when present with them—

A faithful minister not only carries his people in his arms like a father, but "travails in birth with them," as a mother[a]. He pants for,

1. Their present edification—

[It is here taken for granted that they are standing on the only true foundation, the Lord Jesus Christ. In truth, if any person have not come to the Lord Jesus Christ as the one foundation of a sinner's hope, he may be *called* a Christian, but he is no other than a baptized heathen — — — But, supposing that the work of conversion have really been wrought in the souls of his people, the faithful minister desires to see them built up, and edified in faith and love. He would not that any of his spiritual children should continue in a state of infantine weakness: he wishes to see them grow, and "increase with the increase of God:" from children he would have them advance to young men and fathers, till they have attained "the full measure of the stature of Christ." If they were as eminent as St. Paul himself, he would "not consider them as having already attained, or as being already perfect;" but he would exhort them to "forget what was behind, and to press forward to that which was before; and never to relax their ardour, till they have finished their course, and attained the prize of their high calling."]

2. Their everlasting salvation—

[They are "begotten to a glorious inheritance:" as children, "they are heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ:" and never does he consider his care for them as terminated, till he sees them translated from earth to heaven. As long as they are in the body, they are exposed to the assaults of Satan: and "he is jealous over them with a godly jealousy, lest that serpent who beguiled our first parents in Paradise, should by any means prevail over them." They are here intermixed with sinners, by whom they may be deceived and defiled. It is in heaven only that they are beyond the reach of temptation: there are none but saints: thither all who bear that sacred character are going: and when he beholds them safely landed on that happy shore, his soul is completely at rest respecting them; and he looks forward to the happy day when he shall be united to them there, as "his joy and crown of rejoicing" for evermore.]

[a] Gal. iv. 19.

But, as occasional separations from them in this world are unavoidable, we may contemplate,

II. His consolation when absent from them—

Though useful to his people as an instrument, he knows that he is not necessary to them; and that God carries on his work within them without his puny efforts. He therefore, when absent from them, commends them,

1. To God, as *the source* of all good—

[From God they have received all the good that is in them; and from the same divine source alone can any blessing flow down unto them. To him, therefore, the minister commits his people. And it is a source of joy to him that they have in God an all-sufficient Friend, who is ever present with them, and tenderly affected towards them, and conversant with all their necessities, and able to supply all their wants. What can they want, if only they live nigh to him? He can "make all grace abound towards them, that they may have always all-sufficiency in all things." To his care, therefore, he commits them with confidence, assured that "He is able to keep them from falling, and to present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."]

2. To the Word, as *the means* of all good—

[The Holy Scriptures are justly called "the word of God's grace," because they contain a wonderful revelation of grace, suited to, and sufficient for, our every want. In that is contained every thing that we can desire, for our instruction, our consolation, and support. By that the whole work of grace may be carried on and perfected within us. It is by that that we are at first begotten to God: and by that shall we be nourished unto life eternal. "The word is *able* for all this, even to build us up, and to give us an inheritance among all them that are sanctified." "By that we are made clean" and "sanctified;" and through its effectual operation on the soul will Christ perfect his whole work within us: as it is said; "He loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water *by the word;* that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it may be holy and without blemish[b]." Now, to this fountain may every saint have access at all times; and out of it, as "from a well of salvation, may he draw water with unutterable joy." To that, therefore, the pious minister commends his people;

[b] Eph. v. 25—27.

knowing, that, if they will but make a just use of it, it will, as God's instrument, accomplish every end for which it has been sent, and perfect the whole of God's work within them.]

What, then, shall now be my parting ADVICE to you?

1. Live nigh to God—

[On this your whole stability will depend. "If you be with him, he will be with you: but, if ye forsake him, he will forsake you." The direction which God gave to Abraham, he gives alike to all his people: "Walk before me, and be perfect." We must set God ever before us, and walk as in his immediate presence; (yet not so much impressed with fear, as with love: for Enoch walked *with* God; he walked not only *before* him as a Master, but *with* him as a Friend:) going with holy boldness into his presence, spreading before him our every want, and desiring his aid in every difficulty. "Acquaint yourselves with God" in this way, and your souls shall "be kept in perfect peace."]

2. Make good use of his word—

[It is by his word, chiefly, that God will direct and comfort your souls. I will not say that the Holy Spirit never operates in a way of direct and immediate agency upon the soul: but we are not to look for that, or expect it, in common cases. It is by shining upon the word, and applying it with power to our souls, that the Spirit usually works: and *that* we may expect; yea, and we shall experience it too, if we meditate upon the word, and pray over it, and implore the Spirit's influence to seal it on our hearts. St. Peter says, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere, the unadulterated milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." You all know how a little child lives upon its mother's breast: and let it be your care to live thus upon the blessed word of God; "esteeming it more than your necessary food," and looking for a constant communication of all needful strength through that appointed medium. Only live upon that word, and it shall surely nourish you unto life eternal.]

3. Keep your eyes steadily fixed on your eternal inheritance—

[The man who is in a race keeps his mind fixed, as it were, upon the prize; which he is determined, if possible, to obtain. Do ye in like manner keep in view the prize of your high calling; and "have respect, even as Moses had, to the recompence of the reward." In the prospect of heaven, every trial will appear light, every effort be accounted easy. What we may meet with in life, or whether we shall ever behold each other's face again in this world, God alone knows. But

let us live for God, and for eternity: let us live, as we shall wish we had lived, when we shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ to receive our eternal doom. Let us go forward in the path of duty, assured, that the rest which awaits us will richly repay our labours, and the crown of righteousness our conflicts.]

OUTLINE NO. 1803

THE BLESSEDNESS OF LIBERALITY.

Acts xx. 35. *Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

SCARCELY any thing can be conceived more calculated to improve our minds, than the committing to memory such portions of Scripture as are peculiarly important. The Jews were accustomed to have select passages of their law fastened upon their garments, in order that they might be continually reminded of their duty. David, with less ostentation, and more piety, "hid God's word within his heart," as the means of preserving him from sin[a]: and he has recommended a similar practice to all young people, in order that their corrupt inclinations may be checked by the recollection of God's commands[b]. Among the various passages which claim peculiar attention, this which is before us has a very distinguished place. It should seem that our gracious Lord was in the habit of frequently inculcating the divine lesson in the text. And so generally was this saying known among his Disciples, that the Evangelists did not judge it necessary to record it in any of their Gospels. Almost thirty years after his death, it was commonly mentioned in the Church, and was enforced by his Apostles as a principle of action, which was to be adopted by all his followers. St. Paul, having summoned the elders of the Ephesian Church to meet him at Miletus, took his final leave of them, and gave them all the cautions and directions which he judged necessary. He entreated them more particularly to

[a] Ps. cxix. 11. [b] Ps. cxix. 8.

cultivate to the uttermost a spirit of benevolence; remembering the example which he himself had set them, and bearing in mind that saying of our Lord, of which he had so often reminded them, namely, that "it was more blessed to give than to receive." Happily for us, St. Luke was inspired to record in the history of St. Paul, what he, and all the other Evangelists had omitted in their histories of Christ. And the very circumstance of its being so providentially preserved, may well render it an object of our most attentive regard.

Let us consider then,

I. The grounds of this declaration—

That the man who lessens his property by giving, should, by that very act, become more truly blessed than the most destitute person can be made by receiving, appears a paradox that cannot be explained. But to evince the truth of it, we shall point out some particulars, wherein the act of giving is manifestly more blessed than that of receiving—

I. It calls forth more noble feelings—

[The feelings of him who receives in a becoming manner, are by no means despicable. Gratitude is a very refined and dignified sensation; and, when ennobled by a view of God's hand, and an acknowledgment of his overruling providence in raising up to us a benefactor, it becomes one of the noblest exercises of the human mind. Yet we must confess, that the donor has the advantage of the receiver in these respects: for generosity and compassion are more elevated sentiments than gratitude, inasmuch as they have in them less of what is selfish, and originate, not in any personal gratification, but solely in the wants and miseries of a fellow-creature. Moreover, if the donor be in a right spirit, he will act altogether with a view to God's glory: he will consider himself simply as God's agent or steward; and, instead of admiring himself on account of what he does for God, he will bless and magnify his God for employing him in so honourable a service. Would we form a just idea of the feelings of a good man discharging the duties of benevolence; let us paint to ourselves the sensations of the angel who was sent to strengthen our Saviour after his conflicts with all the powers of darkness[c]. Did *he* receive with joy the

[c] Luke xxiii. 43.

Father's mandate? did he fly on the wings of love to execute his divine commission? did he administer consolation to Jesus with unutterable tenderness; and return with ardent gratitude to express his sense of the high honour conferred upon him? In him then we behold the true image of a saint, performing towards the afflicted the kind offices of love.]

2. It more assimilates us to the Deity—

[We do not at first sight behold any likeness to the Deity in him who receives an alms: yet, methinks, we may, without dishonouring our God, trace some resemblance: for Jehovah himself is receiving daily from his creatures a tribute of prayer and praise, which comes up before him as incense, and is the offering by which he considers himself as glorified. Moreover, our blessed Lord identifies himself with his distressed followers, and acknowledges himself as fed and clothed, when food and raiment are administered to them[d]: yea, in the days of his flesh, he condescended to subsist through the benevolence of others[e]. But in the donor there is a very striking likeness to the Deity, who is daily "opening his hand, and filling all things living with plenteousness." More particularly, if the donor be overlooking the trifling distinctions of neighbourhood or of party, and be extending his alms to all, whether friends or enemies, he approves himself in the highest degree conformable to the image of his God, who is "the comforter of all them that are cast down[f]," and who makes "his sun to rise upon the evil and upon the good, and sends his rain upon the just, and upon the unjust[g]."]

3. It is a source of more extensive benefits—

[He who receives an alms, benefits himself and those who depend upon him. The world around him too derive some good from his example, in that he teaches them a quiet submission to the will of God in circumstances of affliction and necessity. But the good which is done by the donor is almost incalculable. In the first place, he relieves the wants of *others*, who but for his timely aid, perhaps, must have languished, or even perished, for want. But the joys of penury relieved, form but a small portion of the benefits which a benevolent Christian imparts. He exceedingly improves *his own soul*, confirming in himself the most benevolent affections, and establishing habits which greatly conduce to his own happiness. Nor are the advantages which accrue to himself confined to this world: for even in heaven will he have a recompence[h], and that too proportioned to the zeal with which he had cul-

[d] Matt. xxv. 35, 36. [e] Luke viii. 3. [f] 2 Cor. vii. 6.
[g] Matt. v. 44, 45, 48. [h] Luke xiv. 14. and xvi. 9.

tivated the principle of love[i]. Moreover, the benefits extend to *all around him.* Who can estimate the good which he does to the souls of others, while he adorns and recommends the Gospel of Christ? for, he not only makes himself an example to other professors of religion, and provokes them to emulation, but he removes the prejudices of the ungodly, and constrains them to confess the excellence of those principles which in their hearts they abhor[k]. With humble reverence we may say, that the benefit reaches even to *Christ himself:* for, as "in all the afflictions of his people he is afflicted[l]," so in all their consolations also he is comforted[m]. Further, if further we can go, even *God the Father also* is made a partaker of the benefit. For that which above all things he regards, is, his own glory: and our alms-deeds are often the occasion of most heartfelt praises and thanksgivings to him. *This* St. Paul specifies as one of the most blessed effects of liberality; an effect, in comparison of which, the relief of a fellow-creature is almost unworthy of notice[n].]

Having pointed out the grounds of this extraordinary declaration, we proceed to shew,

II. The improvement that should be made of it—

St. Paul, in exhorting the Ephesian Elders to "*remember* this saying of the Lord Jesus," designed to stimulate them to a suitable improvement of it. Now it will be found of use to us,

1. To form our principles—

[There is a benevolence which is extremely profitable to the world in a temporal view, while it is altogether unprofitable, and even ruinous, to their spiritual interests. When this principle is considered as *the whole* of religion, when it is made the foundation of a sinner's hope, and substituted in the place of Christ, it is then worthless, and odious, in the sight of God. But when it is cultivated from a regard to Christ, and exercised with a view to his glory, it is "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice well-pleasing to God[o]." When viewed with all its attendant exercises of mind, it is the sum and substance of all practical religion[p]. Without this, all pretences to religion are vain: for if we do not love our brother, whom we have seen, it is impossible that we should love God, whom we have not seen[q]. As for wealth, we should consider it as of no value, any further than it enables us to exercise ourselves in offices of love. To amass wealth, or to spend it on ourselves,

[i] 2 Cor. ix. 6. [k] Matt. v. 16. [l] Isai. lxiii. 9.
[m] Matt. xxv. 40. [n] 2 Cor. ix. 12. [o] Phil. iv. 18.
[p] Gal. vi. 2. [q] 1 John iv. 20.

should afford us no pleasure, in comparison of devoting it to pious purposes: for, if it is more blessed to give it away, than to receive the most needful supplies, much more must the giving it away render us more blessed than either the spending or the saving of it can do. This is manifestly the scope of the divine aphorism in the text; and on this estimate of wealth our principles should be formed. It should be an established maxim with us, that to do good is to receive good, and to exercise love is to be truly blessed.]

2. To regulate our practice—

[Let the fore-mentioned principle be duly considered: and, when we are fully persuaded that to do good is the surest way to receive good, we shall gladly embrace every opportunity of benefiting others, and of getting good to ourselves.

Behold then, an opportunity now offers itself to every one of you! and, in the name of our adorable Lord, we entreat you both to *confer*, and to *receive*, blessedness.

First, *confer* blessedness[r] — — — Think that perhaps your present generosity may be overruled, not merely for the temporal relief of a distressed brother, but for the everlasting salvation of some immortal soul. O let this thought stimulate you to the most cheerful and beneficent exertions.

If any say, "I have nothing but what I earn by manual labour; and even that is little more than suffices for my own necessities;" I answer, This is the very case stated by St. Paul, who determines that such persons ought to give according to their ability[s]; and, in the very verse before the text, he tells us how he himself acted under those circumstances; and then he adds, "I have shewed you, that, *so* labouring, ye ought to support the weak[t]."

Next, *receive* blessedness. We have hitherto spoken on behalf of our indigent and afflicted brethren. But we must change our voice: it is not for them, so much as for *you*, that we preach: yes, you who are opulent, you who have the means of doing good, you are the persons *to* whom we preach, and *for* whom we preach. Receive blessedness, I say; far greater blessedness than it is in your power to confer on others. Strengthen in yourselves the habits of benevolence. Imitate Him "who went about doing good;" Him, "who, though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich[u]." Imitate the God and Father of the universe, whose tender mercy is over all his works.

[r] If this be a *Charity Sermon*, it will be proper in this place to shew the particular nature of the charity, and what blessings are likely to accrue from it.

[s] Eph. iv. 28. [t] ver. 34, 35. [u] 2 Cor. viii. 9.

Go, and put your money into his hands: for, "what you give to the poor, you lend unto the Lord; and he will pay it you again[x]." It is "fruit that will abound to your own account[y]." If you trust in your wealth, it will be a foundation of sand, a broken reed: but do good with it, and you will "lay up in store for yourselves a good foundation against the time to come[z]." Whether then ye covet present or future happiness, "remember the words of the Lord Jesus," and shew the love to others which he has shewn to you[a].]

[x] Prov. xix. 17.
[y] Phil. iv. 14.
[z] 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19.
[a] John xiii. 34.

OUTLINE NO. 1804

PAUL'S READINESS TO SUFFER FOR CHRIST'S SAKE.

Acts xxi. 13. *Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.*

INNUMERABLE are the devices of our great adversary, to blind our eyes, and to keep us in a course of sin; and, when we have been enabled to burst the chains in which he once led us captive, he labours still to tempt and beguile us in every possible way, if so be he may prevail at last to turn us aside from God. None, whilst they continue in the flesh, are out of the reach of his assaults. Even our blessed Lord, when he condescended to assume our nature, "was in all things tempted as we are, though without sin." And such is the subtlety of Satan, that he will instigate even the best of men to become tempters to their brethren. He stirred up Peter to dissuade his Lord from submitting to those sufferings which he had covenanted to endure: and in like manner he moved the saints at Cesarea to dissuade Paul from going up to Jerusalem, whither he was proceeding for the furtherance of his Master's cause. There was at Cesarea a prophet named Agabus, who took Paul's girdle, and bound with it his own hands and feet, and then declared that the owner of that girdle should so be bound by the Jews at Jerusalem, and

be delivered into the hands of the Romans. Immediately all the saints at that place besought Paul with tears to desist from his purpose, that by staying away from Jerusalem he might avoid the predicted evils. This advice, though well meant on their parts, proceeded in reality from Satan himself; who knew, that if he could intimidate the Apostle Paul, he should gain a material advantage over the whole Church of God. But Paul was aware of Satan's device, and saw his agency, though under the semblance of an angel of light: and his answer to his weeping friends shews how every Christian should act, when tempted to turn from the path of duty; "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

From these words we shall take occasion to shew,

I. That the Lord Jesus Christ is worthy of all that we can do or suffer for him—

Were Christians as well acquainted with their Lord as they ought to be, there would be no occasion to insist upon so obvious a truth. But that none may continue ignorant of it, we entreat you to consider,

1. Who he is—

[He is no other than God's co-equal, co-eternal Son; "God of God, Light of light, very God of very God;" even "God over all, blessed for evermore." Every perfection of the Deity is his — — — He is "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person."

Now we are told, that "for a good *man* some would even dare to die:" shall less regard then be shewn for him who is *God*, as well as man? If our admiration of a *creature's* excellence be such as to make us voluntarily surrender up our life for him, shall any thing be deemed too much to do or suffer for the *Creator*, in whom all excellence is combined, and from whom all excellence proceeds? Shall a *star* be so admired, and the *sun* itself not be glorious in our eyes?]

2. What he has done and suffered for us—

[From all eternity, before we or even the worlds were made, did he set his love upon us, and enter into a covenant with the Father to redeem us from the miseries, which he fore-

saw we should bring upon ourselves. In the fulness of time he took upon him our nature for this very end: yes "though he was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, he emptied himself of all his glory, and took upon him the form of a servant." During his whole stay upon earth he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and, when the appointed hour was come, he surrendered himself into the hands of his enemies, and "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

What shall we say to these things? Did he act thus towards us when *enemies;* and shall we account any thing too much to do or suffer for Him, who has shewn himself so great a *friend?*]

3. What he is yet doing for us—

[Day and night is he interceding for us, that the wrath of God, which we have merited, may be averted from us. Whence is it that such barren fig-trees as we are, are yet permitted to cumber the ground? If he had not so often pleaded, "Spare them, O my Father, yet another year!" should we not have long since been cut down, and cast into the fire?

Behold how, notwithstanding all our obstinacy in sin, he is yet sending his word to instruct us, his ministers to invite us, yea more, his good Spirit also to strive with us, if by any means he may save our souls alive. Know ye, that every good purpose or desire that has ever existed in your bosoms, has been inspired by him, with a view to bring you home to the fold of God.

Above all, see what he is doing for his believing people; how he watches over them for good, supplies their every want, carries on his good work in their souls, and makes them more than conquerors over all their enemies!

Think of these things; and then say, Whether such love should not constrain you to live to him, and, if need be, to surrender up your life for him?]

Verily, if we feel no weight in such considerations as these, we can have no interest in Christ; for it is certain,

II. That the true Christian has learned duly to appreciate his worth—

We say not that every Christian has the attainments of the Apostle Paul: but every one resembles him in this, that he entertains worthy thoughts of Christ,

1. In the convictions of his mind—

[Merely nominal Christians are content to compliment Christ with the name of Saviour: but the true believer has a practical sense of his excellency: he views Christ as the one foundation of all his hopes: he sees that nothing but his atoning blood could ever have obtained reconciliation for him with his offended God — — — Except as redeemed by the blood of Christ, the believer has no more hope than the fallen angels: he is convinced that with them he must take his portion to all eternity, if he be not interested in that great Sacrifice which was made for the sins of the whole world.

As bought with the precious blood of Christ, the believer sees that he is the Lord's property, and that to devote himself wholly to him is not only an acceptable, but a highly "reasonable, service." In the deliberate conviction of his mind "he thus judges, that if one died for all, then should all live, not unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them and rose again." And this we say is the *universal* sentiment of all true Christians: for the Apostle says, "None of us (of us Christians) liveth to himself, and *no man* dieth unto himself; but whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; so that, whether living or dying, we are the Lord's."]

2. In the purposes of his heart—

[This is not a speculative sentiment in the believer's mind, but a rooted principle, that operates in the whole of his behaviour. In his eyes, Christ "is exalted, and extolled, and is very high." No words can express how "precious He is to him." Hence he gladly gives himself up to Christ; and seeks to have, not his actions only, but his very "thoughts also, brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." As for the opposition of an ungodly world, he cares not for it: whatever crosses lie in his way, he takes them up; and "rejoices that he is counted worthy to bear them" for his Redeemer's sake. If he be called to sacrifice friends, or interests, or liberty, or even life itself, he draws not back: he has counted the cost, and is ready to pay it; desirous only that "Christ may be magnified in his body, whether by life or death." Like Moses, he "esteems the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt;" and, like Paul, "counts all things but dung, that he may win Christ." In a word, he is "*ready*, not to be bound only, but also to die, at any time and in any manner, for his name's sake."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those whose views of Christ are imperfect—

[Doubtless there is no man that knows him fully, or can "search him out unto perfection." The Apostles themselves "knew him but in part," and "saw him only as through a glass, darkly:" but the generality of Christians behold "no form or comeliness in him" at all, or at least not such as to stir up in their hearts any ardent "desire after him." Now in our text we have a criterion whereby to judge of our views of Christ: do we find our hearts so knit to him with love and gratitude, as to render his "yoke easy to us, and his burthen light?" Is liberty or life itself of no account with us, if by the sacrifice of it we may glorify his name? Then indeed we may be said to know him; then have we that "knowledge of him which is life eternal." But, O, how rare is this! Beloved brethren, search and try your own hearts in relation to it; and if, as is to be feared of too many amongst us, you have never yet been transported with love to his name, beg of God to "reveal him in your hearts" by his Holy Spirit, and to "shine into your hearts, to give you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."]

2. Those whose attachment to him is wavering—

[Many desire to follow Christ, but are afraid to bear his cross. But, brethren, you must have a cross to bear. Though I am no prophet, like Agabus, yet I can tell you, by the Spirit of God, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution." You may not be called to suffer imprisonment and death; but you must be prepared to welcome them, if they should be allotted to you for the sake of Christ. You must expect that your friends will dissuade you from exposing yourselves to the contempt of some, and the hostility of others: and, if your dangers should be great and imminent, they will even try to prevail upon you by their entreaties and *tears*. But beware how you listen to any advice which may divert you from the path of duty. Even good people will sometimes be crying, "Spare thyself," when they see you "abounding" with more than ordinary zeal "in the work of the Lord." But, whilst you *tenderly reprove their weakness* (as Paul did,) be firm and steadfast to your purpose: for "if once you put your hand to the plough, and then look back, you are not fit for the kingdom of God." "Be faithful unto death, and God will give you a crown of life."]

3. Those who are practically manifesting their zeal for his glory—

[Blessed be God, there are some who have already begun the employment of heaven, and are singing, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion for ever and ever." And, as in heaven

there are multitudes who "loved not their lives unto the death," so amongst us, I trust, there are some who would willingly die for the name of the Lord Jesus. Happy, happy they who feel this *readiness* of mind to do and suffer whatever they may be called to; for great is their reward in heaven. Go on, beloved, steadfast in the faith, and never giving way to terror on account of any adversaries. Are you advised to shrink from trials? reply with Nehemiah, "Shall such a man as I flee?" But remember, that your sufficiency for this proceeds from God alone: if not upheld by him, you will, "as soon as tribulation and persecution arise because of the word," be turned aside, and make shipwreck of your faith. Live nigh to the Saviour then, and maintain sweet fellowship with him: then you will find his service a delight; and whatever sufferings you are called to endure for him, you will easily sustain. But, if once you decline from Christ in your heart, his commandments will become grievous to you, and every cross a burthen. The true way to meet even the most formidable death with joy, is to "die daily," and to be continually "looking for, and hasting unto the coming of the day of Christ."]

OUTLINE NO. 1805

PAUL BECOMING A NAZARITE.

Acts xxi. 20—23. *And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: and they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee.*

FEW subjects require so much caution in the preacher, or candour in the hearers, as that which we are now called to contemplate. To lay down general rules is easy: but to apply them to all states and circumstances is a matter of extreme difficulty: just as the drawing a rough outline of the human body may be done by a novice in the art of painting; but to fill up all the parts in the perfect order of nature, requires the hand of a master. Yet it is not uncommon for persons to sit in judgment on their fellow-creatures with as much confidence as if it was impossible

for them to err. The conduct of the Apostle Paul in the passage before us has been much condemned; and a minister almost endangers his own character by undertaking to defend it. But I am persuaded it is defensible, and that he acted as became him in existing circumstances: and I cannot but think, that when the whole Church at Jerusalem united in recommending that conduct, and St. Paul adopted it on their recommendation, it is somewhat presumptuous in us, who are so incompetent to form a judgment in comparison of them, to stigmatize what by them was universally approved. Indeed, to suppose that he who but a few days before had withstood so manfully the solicitations of his friends to keep away from Jerusalem, and had declared himself ready to be bound or to die there, for the Lord's sake, should be left of God to betray the cause which he had undertaken to support, is to dishonour, not the Apostle only, but that God whom he served.

That we may communicate our sentiments clearly, we shall endeavour,

I. To explain the Apostle's conduct—

There was a violent prejudice at Jerusalem against the Apostle Paul—

[St. Paul, having been sent chiefly to the Gentiles, had neglected the Jewish Ritual; whilst the Church at Jerusalem, consisting entirely of Jews, had still been observant of its forms. Nor is this difference to be wondered at; for even the Apostles themselves, for six years after the day of Pentecost, knew not that the Gentiles were to be incorporated with the Jews, and that the partition-wall between them was to be broken down. Hence they, and all their converts, adhered to the ceremonial law, and to many of "the customs," which they had "received by tradition from their fathers:" nor do they appear to have wholly laid them aside, till the destruction of Jerusalem and of the whole Jewish polity rendered the continuance of them impracticable. Considering therefore the veneration in which the Mosaic institutions were held, it is not to be wondered at that the Jewish Christians should regard Paul as an *apostate* from Moses[a].

It was to counteract this idea, that an expedient was devised by James and the Jewish elders. They knew that whilst

[a] ἀποστασίαν διδάσκεις.

this prejudice remained, the Christians at Jerusalem were not likely to reap any benefit from the ministry of Paul; or rather, that great dissensions and divisions were likely to be occasioned by him: and therefore they wished to reconcile the minds of the people by some public act on the part of Paul. It happened that at that time there were four Jewish Christians who were performing vows of Nazariteship in the temple; and it was proposed to Paul to join with them, and to submit to all the rites prescribed to Nazarites by the law: and thus to shew publicly, that, though he had neglected all Jewish ceremonies among the Gentiles, and had maintained that they were no longer binding on the Jews themselves, he did not think that the observance of them was criminal. James was particular in making known to Paul the precise ground on which he wished him to accede to the proposal. He reminded Paul, that he did not mean to interfere with the decree which had been made in reference to the Gentiles many years before, when Paul himself had come up to Jerusalem to inquire respecting the continuance of circumcision; but that he only wished to convince the Christians at Jerusalem that Paul was no enemy to Moses.

On these grounds Paul, who not very long before had himself made a vow of Nazariteship at Cenchrea[b], adopted the plan proposed, and immediately proceeded to carry it into execution.

The particular duties of Nazarites, and the sacrifices they offered at the time of their purification, are stated in the 6th chapter of the book of Numbers. The person who took upon him those vows, was only bound so far as he had voluntarily bound himself: and hence Paul was at liberty to join the other Nazarites, and to complete with them what they alone had begun.]

Such was the precise state of the case, and such the conduct of the Apostle Paul, which now we proceed,

II. To vindicate—

Various are the charges which have been inconsiderately brought against Paul for his conduct on this occasion; but if we view it candidly, we shall find that he was not really obnoxious to any one of them. He has been accused of,

1. Insincerity—

[Great stress is laid on those words of James, "Do this,"

[b] Acts xviii. 18.

"that all may know that those things whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing, but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law[c]." But can we suppose that James exhorted him to declare a downright falsehood, which thousands of Jews there present were able to contradict? Would not such a proposal have excited in Paul the greatest abhorrence? We must understand the proposal as it was understood at the time. The Jewish Christians had been informed, that Paul *set himself against* Moses, and would in no case submit, or suffer any other Jew to submit, to any of his appointments. Now, says James, shew them that this is not true, by submitting to this particular appointment proposed to you. To this proposal Paul acceded. Was there any insincerity in that? No: it precisely accorded with his own views, and was the deliberate expression of his own mind — — —]

2. Inconsistency—

[When Peter had, through fear of some Jewish Christians, been guilty of dissimulation, and had made such a compliance as that recorded in our text, Paul had publicly reproved him before the whole Church[d]: and now that Paul himself was brought into similar circumstances, (it may be said) he acted in the very way that he had before condemned. But this is not a just statement of the case. Peter had acted in a very different manner, and from very different principles. He had not only gone back to Jewish ceremonies himself, but had compelled the Gentiles also to conform to them: and this he had done solely through the fear of man. But St. Paul compelled no one to follow his example: he abridged no man's liberty: he merely conformed to a rite himself, from love to his fellow-creatures, and from a hope of furthering their eternal welfare. The two cases were as different as can well be conceived. St. Paul did nothing but what he had frequently done on other occasions. He had himself circumcised Timothy, that Timothy might find the readier acceptance among the Jews: and St. Paul tells us, that he had always acted on the same principle, whenever a just occasion had arisen; "To the Jews, I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law[e]." Thus, instead of being guilty of any inconsistency, he acted on the very principles which he had invariably pursued.]

3. Unfaithfulness both to God and man—

[St. Paul had received a commission to go to the Gentiles; and to shew both to them, and to the Jews, that the law was

[c] ver. 24. [d] Gal. ii. 11—14. [e] 1 Cor. ix. 20.

abolished, and that both Jews and Gentiles were henceforth to form "one body in Christ:" and, it may be said, that in this act of his, he was "building again the things he had destroyed." But again, I say, we must distinguish between an occasional conformity to a rite for the sake of removing prejudices, and an insisting on that rite as necessary. If he had told the Jews that the ceremonial law was *necessary to be observed* in order to their salvation, he would indeed have betrayed the cause of Christ. If he had even inculcated the observance of it as *having an efficacy towards their acceptance with God*, he would then also have betrayed the cause of Christ: because it is certain, that such an idea would have put the ceremonial law in the place of Christ, and would have made the cross of Christ of no effect[f]. But he merely shewed, that if, on the one hand, men were not to be *saved by* their observance of the law, they would not be *condemned for* it, provided they did not rely upon it for their justification before God. The time for the total abolition of the ceremonial law was not yet fully come: it was gradually passing away; and, when Jerusalem should be destroyed, as it would soon be by the Romans, the whole Jewish law and polity would be swept away together. Till that period should arrive, the observance of the law was purely optional; and whether men observed it or not, they should equally be accepted, provided they acted really with a view to please and honour God[g]. This was the whole that St. Paul's conduct was intended to prove; and his proving it in the way he did, was highly acceptable to God, and profitable to the Church.]

Having shewn the propriety of his conduct, we now proceed,

III. To improve it—

Many valuable lessons we may learn from it; a few of which we will now SUGGEST to you.

1. Endeavour truly and simply to approve yourselves to God—

[God forbid that any thing which has been spoken should be considered as justifying dissimulation, or as countenancing a worldly temporizing spirit: no: we must act uprightly, as in the presence of the heart-searching God. We must so act, as to have "the testimony of our conscience, that with simplicity and godly sincerity, *not with fleshly wisdom*, but by the grace of God, we have our conversation in the world." The Christian should, so to speak, be a transparent character; and should prevent, as far as possible, "his good from being evil spoken

[f] Gal. v. 2—4. [g] Rom. xiv. 2, 3, 6.

of." In acting according to circumstances, we must take care not to be influenced by unhallowed principles, or to carry our concessions to too great an extent. It will sometimes happen, that the path of duty is extremely difficult to find, and that even good men may differ in their judgment respecting it: but in such cases it will be well, after consulting the most aged and experienced of the Lord's people, to commit the matter to the Lord, and to do that which we judge will be most acceptable in his sight: and, if we have the testimony of our consciences, that we are willing to be bound or die for him, we need not fear but that God will guide us aright, or, at least, so guide us, that we shall not greatly err.]

2. As far as you can consistently with a good conscience, consult in your conduct the welfare of those around you—

[That inconsiderate conduct which has no regard to the feelings of others, is common indeed, but highly culpable. We may, by imprudence, cast a stumbling-block before others, when, by a more wise and temperate conduct, we might remove it out of their way. In all such cases, however we may think to please God by our zeal, we grievously offend him by our want of love. Happy would it be if this matter were better understood by young people of every description. Many thousands of persons might be won by a conciliatory conduct, who are repelled and disgusted by the injudicious sallies of intemperate zeal. Children, servants, yea, all of you who are under authority, remember, that if you have souls, so have your parents, and masters, and governors, souls also: and though you are not to concede one Christian principle for any man, or to act in any thing contrary to a known duty, yet you ought, to a certain degree, to "become all things to all men," and to "seek, not your own profit, but the profit of many, that *they* may be saved."]

3. Guard against rash and uncharitable judging—

[If the conduct of Paul, when acting by the advice of James and of all the elders at Jerusalem, has been misunderstood, the conduct of holy men at this time may be misunderstood also; and we may be condemning them for things which God most highly approves. It is impossible for us to judge aright, unless we put ourselves into the precise situation of those whose conduct we are contemplating: nay, more, we should also know the exact motives by which they were actuated. But these things are known perfectly to God alone; to whom alone the office of judging belongs. "Who art thou that judgest another? To his own Master he standeth or falleth." If you do not see the exact propriety of a brother's

conduct, apply to him for an explanation of it, if you will; but judge him not. Are you weak? judge not the strong: are you strong? despise not the weak: but all of you determine this rather, to "take up every stumbling-block out of your brother's way," and "seek those things whereby one may edify another[h]."]

[h] Rom. xiv. 13, 19.

OUTLINE NO. 1806

CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.

Acts xxii. 16. *And now, why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*

THE conversion of St. Paul, taken in connexion with all the circumstances attending it, is one of the most remarkable events recorded in the New Testament. Amongst the numberless observations to which it might give rise, there is one only which I would notice: and that is, that it displays, in a pre-eminent degree, the sovereignty of God in the dispensation of his mercies. Considering how he was engaged at the moment when God was pleased to arrest him in his career of sin; and what condescension was manifested to him, in the personal appearance of the Lord Jesus himself to him, and in the oral communications made to him by the Saviour of the world; it must be acknowledged that he was one of the most signal monuments of divine grace that ever existed from the foundation of the world[a]. But it is with the direction that was given him by Ananias that I propose at this time to occupy your minds: for, though it was addressed to him alone in the first instance, it is precisely what should be delivered to every one that is convinced of sin, and that is inquiring with sincerity, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

I propose, then, to consider this direction,

[a] ver. 15. with 1 Tim. i. 12—16.

I. As given to the Apostle on this occasion—

Being a Jew, he had been circumcised in his infancy, according to the Divine appointment. But now, being converted to the faith of Christ, he must be baptized also, in order to participate in all the blessings of the Christian covenant. Mark,

1. The particular things enjoined—

[He must be baptized. Baptism was the appointed rite of admission into the Christian Church. It was enjoined by the Lord Jesus Christ himself to all his followers without exception; nor could any one be acknowledged as a Disciple of his, till he had submitted to this ordinance.

Baptism however, of itself, could avail nothing to the salvation of his soul. It was the blood of Jesus Christ alone that would cleanse him from his sins: in that fountain, therefore, he must "wash," in order to be purged from his guilt: and this process was the work of faith only. And hence was that further direction given him to "call upon the name of the Lord." The Lord Jesus Christ it was who had appeared to him, and had sent him to Ananias for instruction: and it was that same Lord on whom he must henceforth call, as the one only source of all good, "the Author of eternal salvation to those who seek and obey him[b]." It was the Lord Jesus Christ who had shed his blood for him: and to him must he apply, to sprinkle him with that blood, and thereby to cleanse him from his sin. Accordingly, we find that he did, in the time of his deepest extremity, direct his prayers unto that Saviour, and obtain from him that "grace which proved sufficient for him[c]."

In the discharge of this duty he must make no delay. He might think, perhaps, that he was too vile to be admitted thus at once into covenant with God; or that the Church itself would not receive him; or that, at all events, it would be better for him to wait for a season, in order to evince the sincerity of his faith. But to no such objections must he listen: the path of duty was plain before him; and he must follow it without delay, "not tarrying" a single day under the idea of finding a more convenient season.]

2. The connexion subsisting between them—

[The direction given him appeared to consist of different parts: but it was, in fact, one single act whereby he was to accomplish all. Baptism, though not *necessarily* accompanied with "the washing away of sin," (for Simon Magus was as much "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity" after his baptism as before[d],) was ordinarily, and intimately,

[b] Heb. v. 9. [c] 2 Cor. xii. 8—10. [d] Acts viii. 16, 23.

connected with it. *Of itself*, indeed, it could no nothing; but, *as used in faith*, it did much. As appointed of God, it was *a sign* of the person's believing in Christ, and *a seal* of the righteousness which he had received through faith[e]. It was also *an acknowledgment* on the sinner's part that he was bound to serve the Lord in the way of holiness; and *a pledge* on God's part that he should have grace and strength to do so, if only he would seek it in the exercise of faith and prayer[f]. Thus it was intimately connected both with the justification of the soul, and with its sanctification after the Divine image; and consequently, in the judgment of charity, it might be spoken of as "washing away both the guilt and the pollution of sin." In both these senses it is said to "save" men[g]: but then we must ever remember, that in the act of baptism there was "a calling upon the name of the Lord" for these blessings, and an exercise of faith in him for the communication of them. In itself, it was only *a figurative representation* of the blessings sought for and imparted: the communication of the blessings themselves depended on the sincerity of him who sought them: if he sought them with real humility and faith, they were imparted to his soul; and if not, they were withheld from him: but, as in that day it could not be expected that persons would apply for baptism unless they were sincere, it might well be hoped that, in the ordinance, they really obtained the blessings which they professed to seek, and that "as many as were baptized into Christ did really put on Christ[h]." To this we may add, that God did, on many occasions, accompany that ordinance with a more than ordinary effusion of his Holy Spirit, both in his gifts and graces; according to what is intimated by the Apostle: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy God has saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour[i]." On the day of Pentecost, a hope was held forth to the awakened penitents, that God would so bless this ordinance to them[k]: and many years afterwards was this very connexion spoken of, as realized in the experience of the Corinthian converts. They had been amongst the most abandoned of mankind: yet says the Apostle to them, "But ye are washed (in baptism), but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God[l]." As enjoined of God, the rite is *necessary* for all; but, as performed by man, it is *effectual* to those only who receive it aright, and who possess the dispositions which the ordinance itself supposes and implies.

[e] Rom. iv. 11. [f] Rom. vi. 3, 4. [g] 1 Pet. iii. 21.
[h] Gal. iii. 27. [i] Tit. iii. 5, 6. [k] Acts ii. 38, 39.
[l] 1 Cor. vi. 11.

But to all to whom it proves effectual, we may safely say, "Being buried with Christ in baptism, ye are also therein risen with him, and stand complete through him" in the presence of your God[m].]

But this direction may be considered,

II. As addressed to all who are convinced of their sinful and undone state—

To all such persons it says,

1. Seek the remission of your sins simply through Christ—

[For you he shed his blood upon the cross, even to effect thereby your reconciliation with your offended God and Father[n]: and it was in reference to that event that the prophet spoke, when he said, "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness[o]." In that fountain, therefore, you must wash: there is nothing else that can ever cleanse you from even the smallest sin. As for rivers of tears, they can be of no avail: they may *prepare you for the reception of* mercy, but can never purchase the pardon of one sin: the rivers of Abana and Pharpar would in vain have been applied to by Naaman the Syrian, when the office of healing his leprosy was assigned to Jordan only: and in like manner, how excellent soever any substitute for the blood of Christ may appear, it will effect nothing. On the other hand, "the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all sin[p]:" and therefore I say to every one who feels his need of mercy, "Go to Christ, and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh to you better things than ever the blood of Abel's sacrifice did to him[q];" yea, and better things than the most enlarged heart can conceive[r]. If you have been as moral as Paul in his unconverted state, you *must* seek remission in this way: and if you have been as bloody a persecutor as he, you *may*: "Not one that comes to Him shall ever be cast you."]

2. Look to Him alone for all the blessings that you stand in need of—

[It is characteristic of the Christian in every age and place, that "he calls upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ[s]." Now this does not merely imply an acknowledgment of him as God, but also a dependence on him for all spiritual and eternal blessings. He is appointed by God the

[m] Col. ii. 10—12. [n] Col. i. 20—22. [o] Zech. xiii. 1.
[p] 1 John i. 7. [q] Heb. xii. 24. [r] 1 Cor. ii. 9.
[s] 1 Cor. i. 2. with Rom. x. 11—14.

Father to be "Head over all things to the Church[t]:" and "in him is treasured up a fulness of all spiritual blessings[u]," that "out of his fulness we may all receive[x]" according to our faith, and according to our necessities. Comply, then, with this appointment, and go to him on every occasion; and "let the life which you now live in the flesh be wholly and exclusively by faith in him, even in the Lord Jesus Christ, who has loved you, and given himself for you[y]."]

3. Confess Him openly before men—

[This is one of the great ends of baptism; which, in all cases of adults, implies an open acknowledgment of the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour, and a determined surrender of ourselves to his service[z]. To us, who have been baptized in our infancy, a repetition of the ordinance is uncalled for: but the thing implied in it, is required of every child of man. We must devote ourselves unreservedly to our God and Saviour; and must confess him openly before an ungodly world. Nor can this by any means be dispensed with: for if "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, it is with the mouth that confession is made unto salvation[a]:" and our blessed Lord has warned us, that "if we are ashamed of him, and deny him before men, he will be ashamed of us, and deny us before his Father which is in heaven." Perhaps you may imagine that circumstances are now so different, that there will be no difficulty in confessing Christ. But you will find it still no easy matter to approve yourselves faithful to him in this respect: for, though we are not now in fear of being dragged to prison and to death for our adherence to him, we are certain of exciting much contempt and hatred amongst our friends and relatives, as soon as ever we devote ourselves unreservedly to Christ. It is still as true as ever, *in fact*, though not *in the same degree*, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution:" and we need at this day, as they also did in the apostolic age, to be strengthened from above for this warfare, which every faithful soldier of Christ will have to maintain. For it, therefore, you must prepare; and in it you must engage with all boldness: and you must "be faithful unto death, if ever you would obtain a crown of life."]

4. Let there be no delay in this necessary work—

[You may be ready to think that there is some reason for delay: you have some important engagements at this time, and you wish to stay till they are completed: or you apprehend that a future period will be more favourable than the

[t] Eph. i. 22. [u] Col. i. 19. [x] John i. 16.
[y] Gal. ii. 20. [z] Heb. x. 22, 23. [a] Rom. x. 10.

present. But I must say, that no reason under heaven can justify a neglect or postponement of this duty. Tell me, thou convinced soul, "Why tarriest thou?" Give me a reason: give me a reason that shall satisfy even thine own mind. But I defy you: I defy the whole world to assign so much as one reason that shall bear even a moment's investigation. But I could, if needful, assign a thousand reasons why it is madness to delay. Arise, then; "arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." What! shall it be needful to urge you in such a cause as this? Is there a fountain opened for sin, and will you need to be importuned and urged to wash in it? If one sin lying upon the soul is sufficient to plunge you into everlasting perdition, need you be exhorted to wash away, in one single moment, all that you have ever committed, so that you shall be before God as spotless as if you had never sinned? Is the Lord Jesus Christ ready to answer every petition that your soul can offer, and will you need to be urged to spread before him your requests? Is your honouring of him before men the recompence which he especially requires at your hands for all that he has done and suffered for you, and do you need to be urged to render him this reasonable service? I do hope that some of you, at least, will feel ashamed at your past delay; and that you will now, even before you depart from this place, seek grace from him, that you may be enabled to comply with the directions in my text, and to shew that you have not received such transcendent blessings in vain. Let me also entreat that you will go home in silent meditation, every one of you to his secret chamber, and there prostrate yourselves before him, imploring mercy at his hands, and consecrating to him your every faculty, both of body and soul. Let every one of you be able to say, with David, "I made haste, and delayed not, to keep thy commandments[b]."]

[b] Ps. cxix. 60.

OUTLINE NO. 1807

PAUL'S VINDICATION OF HIMSELF BEFORE FELIX.

Acts xxiv. 14, 15. *But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and the Prophets: and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.*

IN the chapter before us we have a striking instance of the confidence inspired by the consciousness

of truth. St. Paul had been seized under the mistaken idea that he had introduced a heathen into the temple, and profaned the temple. Had there been no other ground of animosity against him, it is probable that he would soon have convinced his adversaries of their mistake; but he was the great Apostle of the Gentiles, and therefore very obnoxious to the whole Jewish nation. Hence a prejudice existed against him, as hostile to the temple and the law: and the moment a cry was raised against him, though on quite a mistaken ground, it excited an universal tumult. From the enraged populace he was rescued by the Roman soldiers: and an opportunity was thus afforded him of vindicating himself before the Roman Governor at Cesarea. Ananias, the high-priest, with the elders of the Jewish people, went down, with a famous orator named Tertullus, to accuse him. Tertullus, anxious only to obtain judgment against him, omitted nothing whereby he might gain his cause. He complimented Felix on the equity and acceptableness of his government; when it was universally complained of as most iniquitous: and he charged Paul with the profanation of the temple, of which he had not been in the least guilty; and with exciting the tumult, which the Jews themselves had raised. But, in the midst of all, Paul stood like a rock, unmoved by the waves that dash upon it. When permitted to speak, he followed his accuser through the various articles of the charge. In his introduction, he shewed the difference between the artful compliments of a courtier, and the respectful address of a Christian: and, in the remainder of his short apology, he refuted every accusation that was brought against him. There was one part indeed of the charge, which, in a less obnoxious form, he acknowledged. He was accused of being "a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes:" "*This*," says he, "I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers."

Now from this acknowledgment of his we shall take occasion to shew,

I. In what way the Christian serves his God—

We have not here to consider the Christian's experience at large; but simply to advert to his *faith* and *hope*—

[The Christian "*believes* all things that are written in the law and the prophets." Whatever God has told him, whether it accord with his pre-conceived notions or not; yea, whether he can comprehend it or not; he does not presume to gainsay it, but receives it upon the authority of God — — — But the things to which the Apostle more especially alluded in the text, were those which relate to Christ and his Gospel[a]; such as the prophecies which predicted his advent, the representations which shadowed forth his work and offices; and the promises made to his obedient followers; all of which are embraced by the Christian with faith unfeigned.

This is the foundation on which the Christian builds his *hope*. He expects assuredly, that "there shall be a resurrection both of the just and unjust," when "every one shall receive according to that he hath done, whether it be good or evil." To the ungodly this period is an object of fear and terror; but to the Christian, of joyful hope. He "knows in whom he has believed; and is presuaded, that what He hath promised, he is able also to perform:" to that day therefore he looks forward, as the completion of all his wishes, and the consummation of all his joys — — —]

In all this there appears to be nothing very remarkable. But before we affirm that, let us consider,

II. In what light this service of his is often viewed—

[Where these sentiments are held in a merely speculative manner, they give no offence: they are even approved as orthodox: but where they are practically maintained and enforced, they are vilified as "heresy," and loaded with every opprobrious name. It is in vain that we appeal "to the law and the prophets;" it is in vain that we shew to men that these are the things "which they themselves allow;" in vain we refer them to the articles and homilies, which contain the acknowledged sentiments of our Church; or to the prayers which every member of our Church offers up to God: nothing can convince men that we are not heretics or fanatics. Practical Christians are still "a sect everywhere spoken against[b]."

Now what is the reason of this? Whence is it that the same truths which are approved in theory, should be disap-

[a] Acts xxvi. 22, 23. [b] Acts xxviii. 22.

proved when reduced to practice? The reason is, that whilst held in theory only, they leave us in full possession of all our evil habits and propensities; but when applied to practice, they produce a course of life directly opposite to the desires of the flesh, and the customs of the world. Suppose, for instance, a man's *faith* be such as enables him to realize all that the Scriptures have spoken; to tremble at every threatening, and to expect the accomplishment of every promise; suppose it lead him to "live entirely by faith on the Son of God," as "all his salvation and all his desire:" what a difference will this of necessity put between him and others! Suppose his *hope* also be such as disposes him to live in daily preparation for his last account, and in a blessed anticipation of the glory that awaits him; will not this make him appear strange and singular? and will not those who feel condemned by his heavenly life, reflect on him, rather than on themselves? Doubtless they will: they did so in the days of Christ and his Apostles; who neither said, nor did, more than the Scriptures required: but the people hated the light, and would not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved; and agreed to brand that as heresy, which they could not prevail upon themselves to embrace and practise. And thus it will be to the end of time: men will let you think as you please, if only you will conform to their habits: but if you will take the Scriptures as the only rule of your faith and practice, you shall be hated and reviled for it as long as there is an ungodly man upon earth: "He that is born after the flesh, will, and cannot but, hate and persecute him that is born after the Spirit:" "The servant cannot be above his Lord."]

What then is to be done? Are we to lay aside this service? if not, let us inquire,

III. In what manner it is to be maintained—

This whole apology affords us a very bright example. We are not to sacrifice truth and virtue to a senseless or malignant clamour; but to maintain our principles,

1. With firmness of mind—

[We are to "prove all things; and then to hold fast that which is good[c]." We cannot be too careful in examining every principle which is inculcated as of Divine authority. We should never give our assent to any doctrine whatever upon the testimony of man; but should search the Scriptures for ourselves, to see whether the things we hear be agreeable to them or not. But, when once we are satisfied that any

[c] 1 Thess. v. 21.

thing is really from God, then we must "hold it fast." We must "not be tossed to and fro, like children, with every wind of doctrine;" nor, on the other hand, must we be deterred from confessing Christ through the fear of man: but we must "hold fast that which we have received, that no man may take our crown[d]:" we must "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering[e]." St. Paul had enough to intimidate him, if there were any legitimate reason for yielding to the impressions of fear on such occasions: but "nothing could move him: not even life itself was of any value in his sight," when standing in competition with fidelity to his Lord. It was his attachment to Christ that was the real ground of the persecution he now met with; yet he would not deny his Lord; but confessed himself "an heretic," according to *their* acceptation of the term. Thus should we be steadfast in the faith; and be willing even to lay down our lives in its defence.]

2. With tenderness of spirit—

[There is a contemptuous way of speaking of the world, in which some professors of religion indulge themselves, which is extremely reprehensible. It is true indeed that the world are both blind and carnal; but we ought to look well to our own spirit when we take upon ourselves to call them so: for, "who is it that has made us to differ? or what have we that we have not received?" When we think of their blindness and carnality, it should not be in the proud spirit of a Pharisee, "Stand off, I am holier than thou," but with tears, even with floods of tears, on account of their unhappy condition[f]. We should call to mind our own former blindness, (as Paul does[g],) for the humiliation of our own souls, and as an encouragement to seek their welfare. And "we should be ready always to give a reason of the hope that is in us with meekness and fear[h];" "in meekness instructing them, if God peradventure may give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth[i]" — — —]

3. With purity of heart—

[This the Apostle particularly specified as the associate of his faith and hope[k]. To profess a regard for Christian principles whilst we are regardless of Christian practice, is only to deceive our own souls. Faith and a good conscience are the two pillars on which the fabric of our religion stands: and if either of them give way, the other falls of course[l]. The world will try our principles by this touchstone: they will say,

[d] Rev. iii. 11. [e] Heb. x. 23.
[f] Luke xix. 41. Ps. cxix. 136. Jer. xiii. 17.
[g] Acts xxvi. 9—11. [h] 1 Pet. iii. 15. [i] 2 Tim. ii. 22—24
[k] ver. 16. [l] 1 Tim. iii. 9. and i. 19.

" What do ye more than others?" And truly, when we profess so much higher principles than they, they have a right to expect in us a purer life. Not that they would be justified in rejecting the Gospel, even if every professor of it were to become a Judas: but such is their perverseness, that they will harden themselves more against religion on account of one Judas, than they will esteem it for the piety of a dozen other Apostles. This however is only an additional reason for watchfulness on our part. Whatever may be the conduct of the world, " our duty is to shew them our faith by our works." In this way we may hope at least to do some good: we shall " by well-doing put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," and " make *them* ashamed who falsely accuse our good conversation in Christ." We may hope too that in some instances we may accomplish more; and " win by our good conversation those who never would listen to the written word." At all events, it is in this way that we must approve ourselves to God, and stand with confidence before him in the day that he shall judge the world.]

OUTLINE NO. 1808

A CONSCIENCE VOID OF OFFENCE.

Acts xxiv. 16. *Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.*

THE Gospel of Christ has in all ages been stigmatized as having an unfriendly aspect on morality; and its professors have been accused as maintaining this position, " that we may continue in sin that grace may abound." But, however the disgraceful conduct of hypocrites may have appeared to countenance such a charge, it is certain that every true Christian is a living witness for God, and a public monument of the sanctifying influence of the Gospel. St. Paul was not inferior in holiness to any human being, our blessed Lord alone excepted; yet was he inveighed against as a man that was not fit to live upon the earth. In the passage before us we have an account of the accusations brought against him by a certain orator, named Tertullus. He was represented as " a pestilent fellow, a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, a ringleader of the sect

of the Nazarenes, and, to complete the whole, an impious profaner of the temple[a]." In other words, he was accused of sedition, heresy, and profaneness. In answer to these allegations he shews that, *as to sedition,* the reason of his coming to Jerusalem was to bring alms to his nation, and to present his offerings to God; and that his demeanour there had been peaceable and quiet, for they had not found him in the temple disputing with any man, nor raising up the people either in the synagogue, or in the city. As to the charge of *heresy,* he acknowledges, that after the way that they called heresy, he did worship the God of his fathers, believing those very Scriptures, and hoping for the accomplishment of that very resurrection, which his accusers themselves professed to believe and hope for. And lastly, as to the *profaneness* and impiety with which they charged him, he declares that his principles led him to a far different conduct: that that faith and hope, which he professed, stimulated him to the most scrupulous performance of every duty both to God and man: "herein," says he, (or it might be translated, *on this account,* that is, on account of this faith and hope,) "I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men."

We propose to shew,

I. What is the attainment which every true Christian labours for.

II. The vast importance of it to every child of man.

I. What is the attainment, &c.—

Without entering into any metaphysical inquiries concerning the *nature* of conscience, we may observe that its *office* is to testify to every man the quality of his past actions, and to regulate his conduct agreeably to some standard of right and wrong. It does not so properly judge respecting the truth or falsehood of any position: (*that* is rather the office of the understanding) it regards rather actions than sentiments; and the good or evil that is in them, rather than any

[a] ver. 5, 6.

prudential considerations respecting them. It is a monitor in every man's own bosom that may be called, in a qualified sense, the voice of God within him. It is not wholly subject to his own controul: for though much may be done to bribe, or silence it, yet sometimes it will speak out, and force the most obdurate sinner to listen to its voice.

The rules whereby it judges are various: where the light of revelation does not shine, it has no better rule than the law of nature, or the law of a man's own mind. It is *then* regulated by every man's own apprehensions of good or evil; and therefore must of necessity give a verdict more or less erroneous, as the person's mind is more or less instructed in moral truth. On this account, it would not be easy with respect to heathens to determine precisely what a conscience void of offence is; for certainly, allowances must be made for the different degrees of light which men enjoy. But with respect to us, who live under the clear dispensation of the Gospel, these difficulties in a great measure vanish. The following considerations may help to throw some light upon the subject.

The conscience is not to be judged void of offence *merely because it does not accuse us.* There are many so thoughtless and dissipated that they give themselves no time to reflect. They are engaged in a continual round of business or amusement; they shun all those scenes which would be likely to bring their sins to remembrance; they avoid all serious conversation; and thus they pass months and years without feeling any remonstrances of conscience: that faculty is lulled asleep; and, if by any means it be in the least degree awakened, every method is adopted to check its clamours, and restore its wonted tranquillity. Of such persons God speaks by the Prophet Hosea, when he says, "They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness."

There are others who imbibe principles which are well calculated to weaken the influence of conscience. They take it for granted, that there is no great evil in sin; that God will never execute his threatenings

against it; that *they* cannot be obnoxious to his wrath, because they have not committed any heinous sins, or, if they have, they were only such as the fashions of the world, and the frailties of their nature might well excuse. By such principles as these they persuade themselves that they have no ground for fear: like some of the Jews of old, they "heal their wounds slightly, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace," or, like others of them, they affirm boldly, "I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart."

There is yet another description of persons who have at times been harassed with remorse of conscience; but they have so often resisted their convictions, sinned against the light, and done violence to all their own feelings, that they have, as the Apostle says, "seared their consciences as with a hot iron," and rendered themselves "past feeling."

Now it will be needless to prove that such persons have not a conscience void of offence; they may be rather said to have no conscience at all; or, if they have, it must be called, what the Apostle does call it, an *evil conscience.*

As a conscience is not void of offence merely because it does not accuse, so neither is it *necessarily* so, *even if it should approve.*

Many propose to themselves a false standard of right and wrong. Even among those who bear the Christian name, how many are there who think that religion consists in penances and pilgrimages, and in the observance of superstitious rites and ceremonies; yea, who would think, that the extirpation of heretics was the most meritorious work they could effect! Yet, if they were to abound in such works as these, and thereby gain the approbation of their own consciences, must we therefore say that their consciences were void of offence? Surely not. St. Paul has told us with respect to himself, that he verily "thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus:" but does he assert his innocence upon that ground? No; he calls himself "a blasphemer and

injurious, and a persecutor, yea, the very chief of sinners." Our Lord tells his Disciples, that many would think, "whosoever killed them would do God service:" but could this conceit excuse their murderous acts? No. If we act upon wrong principles, our actions must be bad: nor can our error change the quality of our actions: it may indeed extenuate our guilt; but it can never render that good, which is in its own nature evil.

To speak then immediately to the point—There are two things necessary to constitute a conscience void of offence; it must have a clear discovery of the rule of duty; and it must testify upon good grounds, that there is a correspondence between that rule and our actions.

It must have a clear discovery of the rule of duty. The rule of duty is concise and plain: we are to "love God with all our heart and soul and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves: on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Now this rule, in theory, is universally acknowledged; but, through the influence of our carnal interests and passions, we lose sight of it entirely, and imagine ourselves conforming to it, when we are violating it in every point of view. We suppose that the love of this present world will consist with a good conscience, though God himself has told us, that "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." We think we may indulge pride, envy, selfishness, and a thousand other malignant passions, and yet conform to the law of love.

While the eyes of our understanding are thus blinded, we cannot be said to have a conscience void of offence; because the conscience being unenlightened with respect to the rule of judging, it cannot possibly give a just verdict on our case. It must be acquainted with the several relations in which we stand to God and man: it must see what is required of us as creatures, as sinners, as redeemed. It must know that God claims our entire dependence, supreme regard, unreserved obedience. It must feel the

necessity of abasing ourselves before God in dust and ashes, and of "fleeing for refuge to the hope set before us." In short, it must be convinced, that "a life of faith on the Son of God," and "a cleaving to him with full purpose of heart," are the distinguishing features of the true Christian. But besides this, it must be acquainted also with the several duties which we owe to our fellow-creatures, as superiors, equals, and inferiors; and that too not only in their civil capacity, but in their relation to us as members of Christ's mystical body. When it is thus enlightened, then, and then only, is it capable of being void of offence toward God and man.

But it is yet further necessary that conscience should be able to testify, upon good grounds, that there is a correspondence between this rule of duty and our actions.

Its testimony must proceed from a watchful observation of all our motives and principles of action. It must be in the habit of bringing our conduct to the touchstone, and of discerning between the pure metal and the most specious counterfeits. It must be on its guard against the bias it receives from prejudice and passion; and must be able to appeal to the heart-searching God for the truth of its testimony. Not that it need testify, that there is no sin in us; for then who could ever receive a favourable verdict, seeing "that in many things we all offend?" But its testimony must be to *this* effect; that, after searching the sacred records, after praying for the teachings of God's Spirit, after carefully investigating not only our actions, but our motives and principles, and after comparing these with the rule of duty, it cannot discern that there is any one sin habitually indulged, or any one duty allowedly neglected.

This is the true import of what is called in our text, "a conscience void of offence:" and this every true Christian labours to maintain.

We now come to shew,

1. The vast importance of it to every child of man—

Men in general are well pleased if they can secure

the approbation of their *fellow-creatures*, and maintain a character for probity in *the world*. They are therefore chiefly attentive to their *external* conduct, and not very solicitous about the thoughts or desires of their hearts. But this will not satisfy the true Christian. He knows that the eye of God is upon his heart, and that the most secret thought is "naked and open before him." Like the Apostle, he accounts it "a small matter to be judged of man's judgment;" he says, 'What good can the applause of men do me, if I be condemned of my Judge? Or, why need I regard the opinion of the world, if I am accepted and applauded by my God?' Seeing how contemptible every testimony is in comparison of that of his Maker, he "studies to approve himself to God, a servant that needeth not to be ashamed." In whatever relation of life he stand, he endeavours to fulfil the duties of it. Is he in authority? he conscientiously improves his influence for the good of men and for the glory of God. More especially, if he sustain that weighty office of a minister of Christ, he will not be a faithless steward, or a slothful servant, but will "be instant in season and out of season," and will "watch for souls as one that must give account." On the other hand, is he in an inferior station? he will perform his duties, "not with eye-service, as a man-pleaser, but as unto God." He will not esteem himself at liberty to yield a *partial* obedience: he will not think that his observance of relative duties supersedes the necessity of delight in God: nor, on the other hand, will he imagine, that the devoutest exercise of prayer and praise can absolve him from his obligation to equity and mercy. Every duty both to God and man occupies his attention, and is performed in its season, "without partiality and without hypocrisy." Nor is this strictness merely *occasional:* it does not exist only in a time of sickness, or during a season of preparation for the Lord's supper: no: he is "*always*" engaged in the same "exercise:" the law of God is written in his heart; obedience to it is his delight; nor can any consideration whatever divert

him from his purpose. He is not insensible how hard it is to flesh and blood to "cut off a right hand, and to pluck out a right eye:" but no regard to carnal ease will induce him to spare his idol. He expects not that the world should love or honour him, when he recollects how it treated his divine Master: he is well assured that, "if he will live godly in Christ Jesus, he must suffer persecution." But so far from being terrified at the cross, he takes it up and glories in it. He reverences himself, his conscience I mean, more than he does the whole world. He studies by meditation and prayer to get his conscience well informed; and then he confers not with flesh and blood: he asks only, "What is duty? How shall I maintain a good conscience? How shall I please my God?" These questions satisfactorily determined, he can say with the Apostle, "I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in the path of duty, for the name of the Lord Jesus."

That this is no exaggerated statement, but really the character of every true Christian, will appear from the clearest declarations of Holy Writ.

St. Paul repeatedly speaks of Christians in this light: he represents them as being "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom they shine as lights in the world:" and he prays for them that they may be "sincere and without offence until the day of Christ;" yea, "that their whole spirit, soul, and body, may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." And David, giving the character of those who are accepted of God, expressly declares that they are "without guile." "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered; blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and *in whose spirit there is no guile.*"

If it would afford us any additional satisfaction to find men of like passions with ourselves who have attained to this character, the Scriptures afford us many striking instances. St. Paul himself could testify

before the Jewish Sanhedrim, that he had "lived in all good conscience before God until that day." And in another place he speaks of the testimony which his own conscience bore to his character in these respects, as a source of most exalted pleasure to his soul: "our rejoicing," says he, "is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world." A similar testimony was given by our Lord himself to a man of far less attainments than St. Paul: of Nathanael he said, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile."

But it may be said, 'We acknowledge that Christians are so described, and that some eminent persons have attained to that character:' but still the question recurs, *Cannot a man be a true Christian, without having such a conscience as has been described?* Before we give a precise answer to this, we should observe, that it is possible a man may be a Christian, and yet not enjoy the *comfort* of such a conscience; the corruptions of his heart, the temptations of Satan, an occasional commission of sin, and even certain disorders of the body, may prevent his conscience from yielding such a testimony; yea, may cause it to accuse and condemn him, notwithstanding he be a real Christian. But if any ask, whether any one can be a true Christian without having a just *ground* for such a testimony, or in other words, whether he can be in a state of salvation without possessing real integrity of heart? we answer, that, if there be any truth in the word of God, HE CANNOT. What says David with respect to this? "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." This cannot mean that if he *have* iniquity in his heart, God will not hear him: but that if he harbour it, or allow it in any instance, it will be in vain for him to hope for any mercy from God. St. John speaks yet more strongly to the same effect: "He that committeth sin is of the devil: whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for *his* seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God: in this the

children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness, is not of God." Now what can be the import of this passage? To interpret it rigorously according to the strict letter of the words, would certainly render it inconsistent with other passages of Scripture, which declare that "there is no man that liveth and sinneth not:" but to reconcile it with any *allowed* sin, is absolutely impossible.

Here then we trust we may satisfactorily close the discussion of our text. Seeing that the conscience has been shewn to be without offence *only* when it can testify of our *unreserved* conformity to God's law; and that no one can be a true Christian, unless it be his chief labour to maintain such a conscience.

It only remains that we

IMPROVE THE SUBJECT.

And now may God in infinite mercy send down upon us his Holy Spirit, to impress our minds with conviction, if we have not yet attained the Christian character, and to fill us with consolation if we have!

We all profess to be Christians in reality, as well as in name. We all feel averse to acknowledge that we have no part or lot in the Gospel salvation: and surely it is a painful task to rob any one of a hope so comfortable, so delightful. It will be far more congenial with our feelings, if we take for granted, that, in this Christian assembly, we all deserve the Christian name. Let us then indulge the pleasing thought: let us now consider ourselves as genuine Disciples of Christ; let us give him the glory of what he has wrought in us; and let us, for the confusion of all the adversaries of the Gospel, and for the confirmation of our own souls, unite in making our acknowledgments to God.

'THOU SEARCHER OF ALL HEARTS, who at this instant observest the state of every soul here before thee, we would not approach thee with any pharisaical boasting, pretending to give the glory to thee, while we are indeed taking it to ourselves: no, Lord,

let that be far from us: we know, that, if we had done all that had been commanded us, we should have been only unprofitable servants: but instead of being merely unprofitable, we feel that we are vile and miserable sinners. Nevertheless, we trust that we are monuments of thy grace; and we desire now to join in humble adorations and thanksgivings for what thou hast done for our souls. Through thy grace and mercy we enjoy a conscience void of offence toward thee and toward man. We feel at this time, that, notwithstanding all our short-comings and defects, we have an unfeigned and uniform desire to please thee. Our consciences testify that there is no one instance wherein we knowingly do to others, what we should not think it right for them, in a change of circumstances, to do to us. Nor are we contented with doing to *men* as we would be done unto: no, Lord: Thou, who seest in secret, knowest what longing desires we have after *thee:* thou beholdest us daily approaching thy footstool with deepest humiliation and contrition; and hourly, as it were, washing in the fountain of Christ's blood, which alone can "purge our consciences from dead works." Nor does our hope of forgiveness embolden us to sin; but rather, thou knowest, animate us to obedience. As for sin, we can appeal to thee, we hate and abhor it. If at any time we commit it, even in thought, thou knowest how much our souls are pained, and how we renew our applications to thee for pardon and strength. We say the truth in Christ, and lie not, our consciences also bearing us witness in the Holy Ghost, that we have great heaviness and continual sorrow in our hearts for the corruptions that yet remain within us; and that, if we could have the desire of our hearts, we would bid an eternal farewell to sin, and be "holy as thou art holy, and perfect as thou art perfect." Dear brethren, have you such an evidence of your sincerity before God? Do you not now feel any misgivings in your consciences respecting these things? If you can thus appeal to the heart-searching God, then earnestly pray that he would perfect his

good work in your hearts; and be "utterly purposed" that from this moment you will no more offend.'

Glad should we be if all were acting thus agreeably to their profession, and walking thus in the paths of peace. But have the consciences of all approved these acknowledgments? Have none felt any misgivings? Has not conscience whispered to any one 'This is not thy state?' If this be the case with any one, let him hearken to the friendly intimation, the faithful remonstrance: for "if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things: but if our heart condemn us not, then, and then only, have we confidence towards God."

OUTLINE NO. 1809

A CONSCIENCE VOID OF OFFENCE[a].

Acts xxiv. 16. *Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.*

THE Gospel is often represented as unfavourable to morality, but true believers are living monuments of its sanctifying influence. St. Paul was deemed a "fellow not worthy to live upon the earth;" he was accused of sedition, heresy, and profaneness[b], but he distinctly and satisfactorily disproved the allegations[c], and boldly affirmed that his principles had quite an opposite effect[d]—

We shall endeavour to shew,

I. What is that attainment which every true Christian labours for—

[a] This Analysis of the foregoing Sermon is added, in order that the reader may see how easily a Skeleton may be turned into an entire Sermon.

[b] ver. 5, 6.

[c] Respecting *Sedition*, ver. 12. *Heresy*, ver. 14, 15. *Profaneness*, in general, ver. 16; in the particular that had been specified, ver. 17, 18.

[d] If ἐν τούτῳ were translated *on this account* (as it might be), the connexion between his principles and conduct would be more clearly marked.

A metaphysical inquiry into the *nature* of conscience would be to little profit. Its *office* is to testify the quality of our actions, and to regulate our conduct agreeably to some standard of right and wrong[e]. The rule whereby it should judge, is, the word of God, and it is considered as good or evil, according to the verdict it gives.

Not that it is void of offence *merely because it does not accuse*—

[There are many so immersed in cares or pleasures that they never reflect on the state of their souls[f]; and, if at any time their conscience be alarmed, they instantly endeavour to check its clamours, and restore its tranquillity. Others persuade themselves that they have no cause for fear, and that they shall have peace notwithstanding all their sins[g]: others have, by resisting, quenched the light within them, and thus have reduced themselves to a state of awful obduracy[h]. Such persons have no other than "an *evil* conscience."]

Nor is a conscience *necessarily* void of offence, *even though it should approve*—

[Many propose to themselves a false standard of right and wrong. By conforming to their own principles they may gain the approbation of their own minds: but it does not *therefore* follow that they are innocent. Their mistakes cannot change the quality of their actions: error may extenuate, but cannot remove their guilt[i].]

To be truly void of offence, conscience must have *a clear discovery of the rule of duty*—

[The rule of duty is concise and plain[k]; this however, though allowed in theory, is practically denied. Men persuade themselves that the love of the world will consist with their

[e] It regards actions rather than sentiments, and the good or evil that is in them rather than any prudential considerations respecting them.

[f] Hos. vii. 2. [g] Jer. viii. 11. Deut. xxix. 19.

[h] 1 Tim. iv. 2.

[i] Would those who think it meritorious to extirpate heretics, or those, of whom our Lord speaks, John xvi. 2. be justified in following the dictates of their deluded consciences? St. Paul determines this in his own case, compare Acts xxvi. 9—11. with 1 Cor. xv. 9. and 1 Tim. i. 13, 15.

[k] Matt. xxii. 37—40.

duty to God[l]; and that pride, envy, selfishness, &c. may accord with love to man[m]. How should conscience, thus blinded, give a just verdict? or how should its blindness cause that to be good which is in itself evil?]

It should be able also to testify upon good grounds that there is a *correspondence between that rule and our actions*—

[It should be in the habit of examining our principles and motives, and be on its guard against any bias from prejudice or passion: it should be able to appeal to God for the truth of its testimony; not that it need to testify of sinless perfection[n]; but it must testify, that, after the strictest search, it can find no sin *habitually* indulged, or duty *allowedly* neglected.]

"A good conscience" being that which every true Christian labours to maintain, I proceed to mark,

II. The vast importance of it to every child of man—

To labour for it is certainly the character of all who fear God—

[The world are satisfied with gaining the applause of men; but the Christian makes but little account of man's judgment[o]. He knows that the eye of God is upon his heart[p]: he therefore "studies to approve himself to God:" he has respect to every part of his duty "toward God and man[q]:" and this, not at certain seasons only, but always: nor will he be deterred by any regard to ease, or interest, or fear. Inquiring only, "What is duty?" he will say with the Apostle[r]—.]

Nor can any one be a true Christian who has not attained it—

[Every pardoned sinner is supposed to be without guile[s]. All in the primitive Church are spoken of in this light[t]. St. Paul did not hesitate to affirm that such was *his* character[u]. And the same is ascribed to one who, in point of experience, was far inferior to him[x]: nor is any one in a state of salvation

[l] 1 John ii. 15.
[m] 1 Cor. xiii. 4—7.
[n] *That* is not possessed by any, Jam. iii. 2.
[o] 1 Cor. iv. 3.
[p] Heb. iv. 13.
[q] He does not think that his observance of relative duties supersedes the necessity of delight in God; nor, on the other hand, that the devoutest exercise of prayer and praise can absolve him from his obligations to equity and mercy. Jam. iii. 17.
[r] Acts xxi. 13.
[s] Ps. xxxii. 2.
[t] Phil. i. 10. and ii. 15. See also 1 Thess. v. 23.
[u] Acts xxiii. 1. 2 Cor. i. 12.
[x] John i. 47.

who has not attained it[y]. This is expressly asserted by David[z], and St. John[a].]

APPLICATION—

[We all are willing to believe ourselves *real* Christians, and it is painful to rob any one of so comfortable a hope. Let us then, as Christians, unite our acknowledgments to God[b]. Let us adore him for that grace, whereby he enables us to maintain, always, and in all things, a conscience void of offence. But if, in this appeal to him, we feel misgivings, or conscience suggest an opposite testimony, let us remember that admonition[c]—.]

[y] Many things may conspire to rob a Christian of *the comfort* of such a conscience, (the corruptions of his heart, the temptations of Satan, and even bodily disorders, may cause him to despond for a season) but *a just ground* for such a conscience he cannot but possess.

[z] Ps. lxvi. 18.

[a] 1 John iii. 8—10. If this were *rigorously* interpreted, it would contradict other passages of scripture, 1 Kings viii. 46. But to reconcile it with *allowed* sin is impossible.

[b] Rom. ix. 1, 2. [c] 1 John iii. 20, 21.

OUTLINE NO. 1810

PAUL'S DISCOURSE BEFORE FELIX.

Acts xxiv. 25. *And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*

MEN usually persist in sin without duly reflecting on its consequences. Hence the peace which they enjoy, notwithstanding they are exposed to the displeasure of the Almighty; yet the voice of warning and reproof will sometimes alarm them. Too often, however, the alarm is only of short duration. This was the case of Felix, when awakened by the preaching of Paul—

I. The subjects of the Apostle's discourse—

He was sent for to explain the principles he professed, but he was not satisfied with gratifying the curiosity of his hearers; he endeavoured to reach their consciences, and convince them of their sins. On this occasion he spoke of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come."

Hence we observe that,

1. The subjects are essential parts of the Gospel—

[Many confine their ideas of the Gospel to the one subject of justification by "the faith of Christ." But the Apostle when dilating on "the faith of Christ," introduced the subjects mentioned in my text. The knowledge of these is in fact necessary to a just comprehension of that. We must see our desert and danger as transgressors of the law, before we can ever duly appreciate the Gospel.]

2. They are of deep and vital interest to every child of man—

[Doubtless they were of peculiar importance to such abandoned characters as Felix and Drusilla[a]: but they are necessary to be impressed on us also. Under the term "righteousness" we must comprehend all the duties which we owe to our neighbour; and under that of "temperance," all that relates to the government of our own appetites and passions. Though we be not guilty of adultery, and avarice, and oppression in their grosser forms, we may find much under these heads for humiliation before God. At the day of judgment we must answer for every secret violation of God's holy law. The prospect of that awful account may well endear to us the Gospel of Christ.]

3. They commend themselves to our reason no less than to our faith—

[St. Paul "reasoned" with his Royal auditors on these subjects. To bring home to the heart of a heathen the salvation of Christ, much previous knowledge was requisite; but to bring him to a sense of his guilt and danger, nothing was necessary but an immediate appeal to his reason and conscience; and, when addressing persons who are ignorant of revelation, we shall do well to adopt the Apostle's plan.]

What degree of success attended his efforts will appear from,

II. The effects it produced—

On Drusilla's mind it seems to have produced no effect—

[She, as a Jewess, must have often heard these subjects treated; but, having sinned against light and knowledge, she was unaffected by all she heard: and thus are many hardened even by the Gospel itself.]

[a] Felix had induced Drusilla to forsake her own husband, and to marry him. he was moreover remarkably avaricious and oppressive.

But Felix "trembled"—

[A curious and uncommon sight! The judge "trembling" at the reasonings of his prisoner! But well might he tremble at the review of his past life and at the prospect of a future retribution. And who has not reason to tremble, if he have not fled to Christ for refuge and found acceptance with God through him? Take the holy law of God, my brethren, and try yourselves by it. Surely there will not be one who will not cry out, as Felix should have done, "What shall I do to be saved?"]

He forbore however to improve the occasion as he ought—

[He promised himself a more convenient season for attending to the concerns of his soul. But what season could be more suitable, than when the Spirit of God was striving with him, and his conscience was awake, and an inspired instructor was at hand to lead him to a Saviour? Could he have better hopes of success, when he had seared his conscience, quenched the Spirit, confirmed his evil habits, and delivered himself up to the chains of Satan? The hoped-for day, alas! never arrived. He still for two years longer continued his avaricious and oppressive habits[b]. O that he had known the day of his visitation, and improved his day of grace!]

Let his example serve as a CAUTION to us—

[All of us have known, in some measure, the motions of God's Spirit. All of us have felt, at times, some general apprehensions respecting the account which we must give at the day of judgment. But how many have silenced their convictions, in hopes of finding some more convenient season for attending to them! And how many have died before the hoped-for opportunity arrived! Let us beware of this device of Satan, whereby he upholds his kingdom in the world[c]. Let us remember, that the same temptations will recur, and the same motives influence us at future periods. Let us attend to that salutary advice of the Apostle[d] — and let us seek, without delay, that godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation[e].]

[b] ver. 26, 27.

[c] He does not tempt any to resolve that they will never repent: but takes the more plausible method of insinuating that they will have a more convenient season for repenting.

[d] Heb. iii. 13, 15. [e] 2 Cor. vii. 10.

OUTLINE NO. 1811

PAUL'S COMMISSION.

Acts xxvi. 17, 18. *Unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.*

NEVER was there a more glorious triumph of Divine grace than in the conversion of St. Paul. How active and inveterate an enemy he was to Christ, previous to his conversion, is well known — — — Had he only been arrested in his career, and humbled, it would have been a signal victory: but to change the whole current of his affections, and to turn against Satan those weapons, which through the instrumentality of this fiery bigot, he had been using to destroy the Church, this was indeed to "beat the sword into a plough-share, and the spear into a pruning-hook," and to display, in the brightest colours, the power and grace of Christ. We do not wonder, that when the Christians, whom he had so cruelly persecuted, heard of "his preaching the faith which he had just before laboured to destroy," "they glorified God in him."

The call of this man to the apostleship, and the particular commission given him, are the points contained in our text. But as St. Paul's ministry differs from ours only in the extent of his commission, and not in the subject of his ministrations, we shall wave any particular notice of him, and state to you the *immediate* and *ultimate*, objects of *our labours*—

I. The immediate objects of our labours—

That there is some considerable difference between the Gentiles and ourselves, we willingly concede. The darkness among them was more entire, their superstitions more absurd, their impieties more gross. But when we have made all due allowance on these heads, we must still say, that the points of resemblance

between us are general, while the points of difference are only few and particular.

What, we would ask, is our state with respect to *knowledge* and *practice*?

[From education we have obtained some general notions of Christianity. But what views have we of the extreme depravity of our nature, and the total alienation of our hearts from God? What insight have we into the way of salvation, as honouring all the perfections of the Deity, and as rendering Christ the hope, the joy, the glory of the universe? Is the beauty of holiness, or the nature and excellence of the spiritual life clearly discerned amongst us? Are the devices of Satan known? and are we so exercised in the use of the Christian armour, as to be able to "fight a good fight," and "war a good warfare?"

Is not our practice too as defective as our knowledge? Satan is "the God of this world," "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." And by what do we discover his agency? is it not by the wickedness to which he instigates the world? See then, whether he do not exercise his power over *us*. Do not envy, wrath, malice, revenge, too often dwell in our hearts? Are not pride, ambition, covetousness, and earthly-mindedness, the principles which actuate us in almost all our pursuits? Do we not harbour in our bosom sensuality, uncleanness, lasciviousness, and a whole host of evil passions! What greater proof can we have, that we are yet "in the snare of the devil, and led captive by him at his will?"]

To rectify the state of our hearers with respect to these things, is the immediate object of our labours—

[We wish "to open the eyes of men, and to turn them from darkness unto light." It is with this view that we set forth the "unparalleled deceitfulness, and desperate wickedness of the heart:" it is with this view that we exhibit Christ in all his fulness, suitableness, and sufficiency: in short, it is with this view that we study, and labour, and pray: and it is the hope of being useful in enlightening your minds, that makes our crosses easy, and our burthens light.

We know, that if light once come into your minds, we may hope to see you cast off the yoke of Satan, and become "the freemen of the Lord." While you continue in darkness, we are aware that you must of necessity remain under the power of the evil one: but when you have learned what provision is made for you in the Gospel, and how effectual the operations of the Holy Spirit shall be for your restoration to

God, we anticipate the result, and rejoice in the prospect of your perfect emancipation. This is the end we desire to accomplish; even that you may be brought to surrender up yourselves unreservedly to God, and live as entirely under his influence, as you have hitherto lived under the influence of Satan.]

But these objects, important as they are, are only means to a further end, which we call,

II. The ultimate object of our labours—

It were a small matter to rectify your sentiments, or to change your conduct, if we did not succeed also in our ulterior objects; namely,

1. The bringing you into a state of acceptance with God—

[What would any change avail you, if you were under the guilt of unpardoned sin? That you all need forgiveness, you yourselves will not deny. And that the attainment of it is the most desirable of all objects, is a truth, which, in seasons of reflection, you cannot but feel. In a dying hour especially, if your minds are at all suitably impressed, you would account it of more value than the whole world. This then, beloved brethren, is what we desire to bring you to. It is painful, inexpressibly painful to us, to see you perishing in the midst of mercy. We long for your salvation: we would account the salvation of a soul as the richest recompence we can possibly receive: and on this account we endeavour to take you by the hand, and to lead you to Christ. We assure you in God's name, that "the blood of Christ will cleanse you from all sin;" and that "all who believe shall be justified from all things." And then do we feel most truly happy, when we see you enjoying peace with God, and walking with him as your reconciled God and Father.]

2. The bringing you to the final and everlasting possession of his glory—

[Our object is not fully attained, till you are placed beyond the reach of harm, in the complete possession of happiness and glory. Could we but prevail with you, we would leave not so much as one of you in a perishing or doubtful state: we would "take all of you from the dunghill, and set you among the princes," "the saints in light." Those who have been set apart in the Divine counsels, and renewed after the Divine image, are already "begotten to an incorruptible inheritance:" even now are they "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." But at present they are only minors, who have the title indeed,

but not the full possession of their estates. We long to help you forward to the latest hour of your lives, and, if you die before us, to see you, like a ship sailing into its destined port, enjoying "an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Then Christ himself "sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied;" and then we also bless our God, that "we have not laboured in vain, or run in vain."]

In improving this subject, we would commend to your attention the following REFLECTIONS:

1. How injurious to the world is prejudice!

[There is a sad prejudice prevailing in the world against the truth itself, and against all who faithfully dispense it. The Gospel is often represented as calculated only to make persons melancholy, if not to drive them mad: and the worst motives that may be conceived, are imputed to us for preaching it. The consequence of this is, that many are kept away from attending the ministration of the word; and many, when they do hear it, shut their ears, and fortify their hearts, against the admission of it. But look into the text, and see what our objects are: is there any thing so formidable in these, that the succeeding in them should be called "a turning of the world upside down?" See the effects of the Gospel elsewhere described: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose;" "Instead of the brier shall grow up the fir-tree, and instead of the thorn shall grow up the myrtle-tree;" "Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert." Are these such changes as are to be deprecated, or that those who are instrumental to them should be regarded as "the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all things?" Search the Scriptures, brethren, and judge for yourselves: or, if ye will form your judgment from the calumnies of a blind ungodly world, then know that these very calumnies are so many testimonies to the truth of what we preach; and that in proportion as our ministry is reviled after the manner of Christ's and his Apostles', the presumption is in our favour, that it does indeed resemble theirs.

2. How highly should the ordinances be prized—

[Conversion, from the first motions of good desire, to the entire formation of the Divine image on the soul, is of the Spirit of God. But the Holy Spirit works by means, and principally by the ministry of his servants in the public ordinances. When therefore we go up to the house of God, we should go thither with a full expectation of meeting our God there, and with an ardent desire to experience his powerful operations on our souls.

There, if we really desire it, our eyes shall be opened, our clouds of darkness dispelled, our chains broken, our iniquities pardoned, and the whole work of salvation perfected within us. Should we then grudge the time that will be occupied in waiting upon God? Should we prefer business, or pleasure, or any worthless indulgences, on the Sabbath, to a devout attendance on the house of prayer? Or should we fear a little banter and ridicule, or the loss of any temporal interest, which may be incurred by shewing an attachment to the Gospel of Christ? If we could have access to any that are now before the throne of God, and could ask them, what they thought of the ordinances? Would they shew towards them the indifference that we do? Would the three thousand who were converted on the day of Pentecost, express regret, that ever they heard that sermon of Peter's, and "continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers?" Learn then now to think of the ordinances as you will think of them hereafter; improve them, whether on the Sabbath-day, or week-day, as you will hereafter wish that you had improved them; and beg of God in private, before ever you go up to his public ordinances, that you may draw water with joy out of those wells of salvation."]

3. How efficacious a principle is faith!

[The concluding words of our text are generally considered as connected only with the word that immediately precedes them: and certainly, in this sense, they declare a most important truth, namely, that we are "*sanctified* by faith in Christ." But we apprehend, that a comma should follow the word "sanctified;" and that the last words of the text should be connected with both the clauses that precede it[a]. Faith is in reality that principle, by which, and by which alone, we obtain all spiritual blessings. Certainly it is that by which we receive the "forgiveness of our sins[b]:" for nothing but faith will unite us to Christ, or interest us in his meritorious death and passion. It is by faith also that we must be "sanctified[c];" for we cannot be renewed but by the Holy Spirit; nor can we receive the Spirit but from, and through, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the exercise of faith. Finally, it is by faith that we must obtain "that inheritance, which God has prepared for them that love him." We must "live by faith," and "stand by faith," and "walk by faith," and be "saved by faith," from first to last. The very text informs us, that by faith we are justified, and sanctified, and glorified. Let us then beg of God to infuse this divine principle into our hearts Let us study

[a] Thus—"That ye, by the faith that is in Christ, may receive, &c."
[b] Rom. v. 1. [c] Acts xv. 9.

the character of Christ more and more; in order that we may know his excellency, and "receive continually out of his fulness;" and that "God may make him unto us Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption."]

OUTLINE NO. 1812

PAUL'S TESTIMONY.

Acts xxvi. 22, 23. *Having obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.*

EVEN to this moment, the Gospel, when faithfully preached, is called "A new doctrine[a]." But it is the very same that it was from the beginning. We know no other "Gospel" than that which "was preached to Abraham," or than that which was delivered to man in Paradise. The only difference between the Apostles and the Prophets was, that the one *foretold* the Saviour who *should* come, and the other *proclaimed* the Saviour who *had* come. As for us, we have only to follow the steps of the Apostles, and to bear the same testimony as was uniformly borne by them.

In the words before us, we have the entire substance of the Apostle's ministrations. Let us notice,

I. The testimony which he bore—

This related both to the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and to the manifestation of him to the world—

[He was not ashamed to declare, that the Lord Jesus Christ had suffered on the accursed tree, and been put to death as a malefactor. But he bore witness, that God had raised him from the dead, and that in and by his resurrection his claims to the Messiahship were established beyond all reasonable doubt[b] ——— Others, indeed, had been raised by the prophets, and by the Lord Jesus Christ himself: but, though raised, they had died at last, like all others of the children of men: but "Christ was risen to die no more[c]:" so that "in

[a] Acts xvii. 19. [b] Rom i. 4. [c] Rom. vi. 9.

that, as in all other things, he had the pre-eminence," and was indeed "the first-born from the dead[d]."

Being now ascended into the highest heavens, he had sent the Holy Spirit to testify of him, and to make known that salvation which was henceforth to be proclaimed in his name; and to be proclaimed, not to the Jews only, but unto Gentiles also, even to the ends of the earth — — —

With these general statements he entered, of course, into all the ends and purposes of this great mystery; and shewed, that by it the salvation of man was affected, since it was for our sins that Christ died, and for our justification that he rose again[e]" — — —]

In the whole of it he insisted on nothing but what Moses and the prophets had declared before him[f]—

[Exceeding full is the testimony which they have borne to the work and offices of the Lord Jesus. Of his death, Moses in fact spake, in all the sacrifices which were offered; as did the prophets also, in the most express terms[g] — — — The resurrection of our Lord, too, was plainly shadowed forth by Moses in the ordinance of the scape-goat, and in the entrance of the high-priest within the vail with the blood of the sacrifices: and with equal plainness was it foretold by David[h], and exemplified in Jonah[i] — — —

The manifestation of him, also, both to Jews and Gentiles, alike occupied their attention; the one exhibiting him as the "Shiloh, to whom the gathering of the people should be[k];" and the other, as given for "a light to lighten the whole world[l]."]

But in our text we are particularly called to notice,

II. The circumstances under which he bore it—

Truly his labours and his sufferings had been such as no human being could have sustained, if he had not been aided and upheld by Almighty power—

[His "labours were more abundant than those of any other Apostle;" and his trials, beyond measure, great[m] — — — But "he obtained help of God," and therefore was enabled to proceed without weariness or dismay — — — God had promised to succour him[n]; and this promise was fulfilled in a

[d] Col. i. 18. [e] Rom. iv. 25. [f] 1 Cor. xv. 3, 4.
[g] Isai. liii. 5. Dan. ix. 26. Zech. xii. 10. [h] Ps. xvi. 10.
[i] Jonah i. 17. [k] Gen. xlix. 10.
[l] Isai. xlii. 6. and xlix. 6.
[m] Compare Rom. xv. 19. and Acts xx. 34. with 2 Cor. vi. 4, 5. and xi. 23—29.
[n] ver. 17.

variety of ways. Sometimes God averted trials from him[o]; sometimes upheld him under them[p]; and sometimes delivered him out of them, when it seemed as if his career had already been brought to a close[q]. Hence the Apostle thankfully acknowledged his obligations both to the providence and grace of God; to the one, as fortifying his mind; and to the other, as strengthening his body, for all that he was called to endure.]

To the same Almighty power must every faithful minister ascribe his continuance in the free discharge of his duty—

[The labours or sufferings of ministers, at this day, are as nothing, in comparison of those which were sustained by the Apostle. But the continuance of life, and health, and liberty, should be regarded as the special gift of God: and more particularly should we acknowledge our preservation from sin and from apostasy, as the very work of God; without whose gracious aid we should never be able to withstand the assaults of our great adversary one single hour. Even the being kept steadfast in the faith is no small mercy: and if we are enabled simply to adhere to the doctrines of the Apostles and prophets without being led aside into any pernicious error or vain conceit, we may well acknowledge, with devoutest gratitude, our obligations to Almighty God.]

We may SEE, in this passage,

1. What is the real ground of that hatred which faithful ministers have to encounter—

[Many reasons were assigned by Paul's enemies for their inveteracy against him: but the true reason was, that he bore a faithful testimony to those very truths which they themselves professed to believe. They could not endure the fidelity with which he called them to receive the testimony of Moses and the prophets. And is not similar fidelity a ground of offence at this day? Yes: there is no man who boldly maintains the authority of Christ, and demands unlimited subjection to him, but the men of this world will cry out against him, as fanatical or righteous overmuch. But, if only we can say that we speak nothing but what the prophets and Apostles have declared before us, we need not regard either the calumnies or opposition of the whole world. The same God that helped Paul will help us also, and will richly recompense into our bosoms whatsoever we may suffer for his sake.]

2. What reason we have for thankfulness, if a faithful ministry be continued to us!

[o] Acts ix. 24, 25. and xviii. 9, 10, 12, 17. and xxiii. 12—31.
[p] 2 Cor. iv. 8—10. 2 Tim. iv. 16—18.
[q] Acts xiv. 19, 20. and xxi. 31, 32. and xxiii. 27.

[Satan is ever on the watch, to rob us of it. Innumerable are the efforts which he makes to intimidate or ensnare the servants of the Lord Jesus. There are no persons in the world against whom he directs his efforts with more subtlety or venom. Surely they greatly need the prayers of their people in their behalf. If Paul said so frequently, "Brethren, pray for us," much more may they, whose attainments are so inferior to his. Let us, then, be thankful to God for the ministry we still enjoy; and whilst it is continued to us, let us improve it with all our might.]

OUTLINE NO. 1813

PAUL'S VINDICATION OF HIS OWN MINISTRY.

Acts xxvi. 24, 25. *And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.*

AMONGST the duties of a Judge, there is not any one of greater importance than that of giving a patient and candid attention to a prisoner's vindication of himself. But this is not always to be found, when religion forms the ground of accusation against a man. Prejudice and passion are too easily called into action on those occasions, and too often usurp the place of reason and reflection. St. Paul had very abundant cause to complain of this. He made many apologies before judges and governors, but could scarcely ever obtain a patient hearing. In the passage before us, he was standing before Festus and Agrippa; but long before he had completed his statement, he was interrupted by Festus, who cried with a loud voice, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad."

It will be profitable to notice,

I. What was the subject of Paul's ministry—

This he himself had briefly, but comprehensively, stated[a]—

[a] ver. 22, 23.

[He preached Christ as a dying and risen Saviour——— and declared to all, "Jews and Gentiles," "small and great," that if they would believe on Jesus, HE would bring them into the full knowledge of the truth, and fill their souls with unutterable peace and joy ——— Nor did he introduce these doctrines as new; for they were none other than "Moses and the Prophets" had declared before; Moses, in the types and shadows of the ceremonial law[b]; and the prophets, in plain and express predictions[c] ———]

And this is the one subject of our ministry also—

[We set before you, from time to time, the great work of redemption, through the sacrifice of the Son of God: and declare to you, that there is no other atonement, no other means of reconciliation, with an offended God. We direct your eyes to Christ also as risen from the dead to a new and endless life; and as not only making intercession for you, but possessing in himself all fulness of spiritual blessings, that you may receive from him whatsoever you stand in need of——— We declare also, that no tongue can express, no imagination conceive, what "light," and peace, and joy, shall flow into your souls, if only you will believe on him, and give yourselves up unreservedly to him.

In these things we are sometimes supposed to bring new things to your ears; but we speak "nothing but what Moses and the prophets most explicitly foretold."]

Unexceptionable as this was, we shall be grieved to see,

II. In what light it was viewed by his enemies—

Festus considered Paul's testimony as an indication of mental derangement—

[Festus, seeing that Paul was a man of erudition, concluded, that he had lost his senses by an over-attention to study; and that, consequently, all further attention to him would only be an unprofitable waste of time. Hence he said aloud, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad."]

And it is scarcely a more favourable judgment that is sometimes formed of us—

[Persons are very ready to pronounce, that those who preach and profess the Gospel, are mad. But whence arises such a judgment as this? Is there any thing in the Gospel itself that affords ground for it? or do the foregoing senti-

[b] Lev. xiv. 4—7. and xvi. 8—10. [c] Isai. liii.

ments deserve so severe a censure? True it is, that the prophets were uniformly reviled for the declarations they made: but one would have hoped, that the accomplishment of their prophecies should have secured for us a more equitable judgment: this however is not to be expected: as long as there remains a carnal mind in existence, so long must it be "enmity against God[d];" and whilst there is a natural man unconverted to God, so long will there be one to whom the things of the Spirit are foolishness[e]. We have only the fate of the prophets of old, who in their day were accounted mad also[f]: and, if judged as they were, we must say with Paul, "If we be beside ourselves, it is to God[g]."

But whence arises this? It arises, first, from their want of candour: they will not give us an attentive hearing; but will run away with any detached expressions, put on them a construction that they were never designed to bear, and draw conclusions from them that we should utterly disavow; and then impute to *us* all the folly which they themselves have invented — — —

Another source of this harsh judgment is, their ignorance of the Scriptures. They will not study the Scriptures for themselves, nor take the trouble to compare our sentiments with the sacred records. What wonder then if they say, We are beside ourselves, when they will not listen even to the voice of God himself? — — —

The hope of vindicating themselves is a further source of the censures they cast on us: for, if they allow us to be right, they must of necessity condemn themselves; but, if they can persuade themselves that we are mad, then they may be considered as wise, and may rest satisfied with their own ungodly ways — — —

These, together with the rooted enmity of the carnal mind against God, are some of the chief sources of that uncharitable judgment, which is passed at this day, no less than in the apostolic age, on the preachers and professors of the Gospel of Christ.]

If the Gospel deserves not such treatment, let us inquire,

III. In what light it ought to be considered—

We cannot but admire the calm and respectful, yet firm and manly, answer which St. Paul returns to the insulting language of his Judge.

[d] Rom. viii. 7.
[e] 1 Cor. i. 18. and ii. 14.
[f] 2 Kings ix. 11. Jer. xxix. 26.
[g] 2 Cor. v. 13.

He maintained that he spoke only "the words of truth and soberness"—

[He was not afraid of his assertions being brought to any test: he knew that they were the very truth of God, and that unbiassed reason must approve of all that he had taught.]

And, as far as our doctrine agrees with his, we also are ready to make our appeal both to reason and Scripture—

[Let our words be tried, and see whether they be not words of truth and soberness. Refer to Moses and the prophets, and see whether they do not set forth Christ as the "All in all" in the salvation of man. See whether they do not characterize a life of faith on the Son of God, as the true, the sure, the only source of happiness, both in this world and the next. They uniformly declare, that, if we "awake from our sleep, and arise from the dead, Christ will give us *light*[h]." — — —

Reason also is no less on our side than Revelation. If there be a God, should we not serve him? If he have provided a Saviour for us, should we not seek an interest in him? If that Saviour be empowered to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, should we not cleave to him with full purpose of heart? Men may call this madness, if they will; but they are the dictates of sound reason: and to contradict them is as irrational as it is impious and profane — — —]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. Be not alarmed at the aspersions cast upon religion—

[Ungodly men will revile religion, and endeavour to deter others from embracing it, by calling it "madness." But the truth is, that they themselves are mad. Try *them* by the standard of reason and revelation, and see whether they can stand the test? — — — No: they are beside themselves; "madness is in their hearts while they live:" "a deceitful heart hath turned them aside, so that they cannot deliver their souls, or say, Have I not a lie in my right hand?" If then they cry out against religion, know whence their clamour proceeds. The Jews said of Christ himself, "He hath a devil, and is mad: Why hear ye him?" Wonder not therefore if similar advice be given in reference to his faithful servants, and similar reasons be assigned for it: and if the service

[h] Eph. v. 14. These words, though quoted by St. Paul, are not contained in any particular passage of the Old Testament; but they are the substance of the whole.

of God must be accounted madness, then take up your cross boldly, and say with David, "I will yet be more vile for the Lord."]

2. Be careful to give no just occasion for them—

[There certainly is such a thing as enthusiasm, and under the influence of it many are led to act so as to excite strong prejudices against religion. But these have much to answer for before God. Religion, in its most exalted state, is "a reasonable," and I may add also, a rational, "service:" "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." Endeavour then to shew, that "God hath given you, not a spirit of fear, but of love, and of power, and of *a sound mind*[i]." Endeavour to "walk in wisdom toward them that are without," yea, and to "walk wisely also before God in a perfect way." Ever remember, that "*truth and soberness*" must go together, and the justness of your sentiments must always be marked in the blamelessness of your conduct. The first thing certainly is to embrace the truth with the simplicity of a little child, not exalting some favourite doctrines, and overlooking others, but giving to every doctrine precisely that degree of importance which it appears to bear in the Holy Scriptures[k]——— The next thing is, to carry your principles into effect, by regulating the whole of your conversation according to them, and fulfilling the duties of your own particular situation, whatever it may be, with care and diligence——— This will "cut off occasion from them that seek occasion against you;" nor is there any better way of "putting to silence the ignorance of foolish men, than by well-doing."]

[i] 2 Tim. i. 7.

[k] Some are always dwelling on predestination and election, others on faith, and others on good works: some on the sufferings of Christ, others on the light within. To give every truth its due weight and proper place, should be the endeavour of a wise and sober-minded Christian.

OUTLINE NO. 1814

THE ALMOST, AND THE REAL, CHRISTIAN COMPARED.

Acts xxvi. 28, 29. *Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.*

IT is surprising to see what different effects the Gospel produces upon different minds; some view it

as the very extreme of folly, whilst others regard it as the most glorious display of Divine wisdom. Even when our blessed Lord himself spake, some of his audience believed his words; whilst others said, "He hath a devil and is mad." Thus differently were some of Paul's auditors affected also, when he vindicated himself before Festus and Agrippa; Festus exclaimed, "Paul, thou art beside thyself;" whilst Agrippa, falling under the force of truth, said, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

The effects however which the Gospel produces on all who receive it aright, is uniform: and St. Paul's answer to Agrippa affords us a fit occasion to set them before you in the clearest manner. It leads us to notice,

I. In what state Agrippa was—

He was *convinced in his judgment*, but *undecided in his will*—

[He was conversant with all the Jewish laws and customs[a], and a firm believer in the prophetic writings[b]: hence he expected assuredly that the promised Messiah would come. Respecting the advent of that Messiah he had had no opportunity of hearing, except from the reports of persons who were adverse to the truth (and such is yet the unhappy lot of kings and princes, who are constrained for the most part to form their judgment from very partial and erroneous statements): but now, from the discourse of Paul, he was convinced that Jesus was the Christ, and that his religion was indeed from God.

Still however he knew not how to embrace this religion himself. He saw that an open profession of Christianity might possibly shake his authority amongst all his subjects; and that at all events it must be attended with a life of mortification and self-denial, since he must renounce "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," and give himself up to God in a life of universal holiness. But this was too great a sacrifice for him to make. If he could be a Christian, and yet retain the pleasures of sense and the honour that cometh of man, he would willingly embrace the Gospel; but if he must encounter so many difficulties, he will rather forego the pearl, than pay the price.]

This, alas! is the state of many amongst ourselves—

[a] ver. 3. [b] ver. 27.

[Many are convinced that the Gospel is true, and that there is "no other name under heaven but that of Christ, whereby we can be saved." They even envy the state of those who follow Christ; and wish, if it might be so, to share their lot in the eternal world. But to expose themselves to shame or loss for professing the Gospel, they dare not: their reputation, and their interests, are too valuable to risk in such a way: to "deny themselves, and take up their cross daily and follow Christ," is a requisition which they know not how to comply with. If they might "serve God and mammon" too, and have "communion with Christ and Belial" at the same time, they would stand forth as open friends of the Gospel; but if they must "follow Christ without the camp," and "forsake all for him," they cannot prevail upon themselves to encounter such difficulties.

This is particularly found amongst those who are held in much estimation in the world. The more eminent and distinguished any are, the more timidity they manifest. If Agrippa had been only a poor man, he would probably have followed up his convictions, and been *altogether* persuaded to become a Christian: but his high rank and conspicuous station operated as an insurmountable barrier in his way. And so it is at this day: the poor embrace the Gospel freely; but the rich and the great and the learned scarcely dare be seen among the followers of the despised Nazarene: and hence it is, that so few of them are called[c].]

But this state, though common, is indeed most dangerous—

[In one view it may appear *hopeful;* because where the judgment is convinced, there is reason to hope that the heart will soon obey the dictates of the understanding: but when once men begin to "rebel against the light," they grieve in a most peculiar manner the Spirit of God, and provoke him to give them up to judicial blindness. True it is, that the struggle between light and darkness is often of long continuance: but during all that time the person is in a most pitiable state. *He enjoys none of the benefits of true religion:* he is a stranger to peace with God, because he does not "cleave to Christ with full purpose of heart:" he has no peace in his own conscience, because he is sensible that he is not upright before God: he has no sense of God's love shed abroad in his heart, no delight in communion with him, no glorious prospects beyond the grave. No: a consciousness that he is not wholly given up to God, eats out all comfort, and fills him rather with painful forebodings of the future judgment. *His state is even worse*

[c] 1 Cor. i. 26.

than if he had been altogether destitute of light[d]. Every hour that he continues to fight against his convictions, greatly augments his guilt[e], and insures a heavier condemnation[f]. The Judge of quick and dead hath told us, "that the man that knew his Lord's will and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes."]

If Agrippa's state then was so dangerous, let us inquire,

II. What is that state in which we should all desire to be—

We cannot but admire the address with which the Apostle answered this irresolute king. He had bonds and imprisonments; but of those he did not wish his bitterest enemies to partake: but of his hopes, his victories, his enjoyments, he wished all to have an equal fruition with himself; with the exception of his bonds, he heartily prayed that they might be altogether in a state like his.

Consider what was the state of the Apostle Paul—

[How clear, how full, how refreshing to his soul, were his views of Christ! Perhaps no human being was ever so highly favoured in this respect as he. And what effects did these views produce? They filled his soul with a "peace that passed all understanding," and a "joy that was unspeakable and glorified:" they called forth all his powers, both of body and mind, into the service of his Lord. He accounted all that he possessed, as bought with the precious blood of Christ, and therefore as to be used for him alone. To make him known to others was the one end for which he lived: and whatever difficulties or dangers he had to encounter for the sake of Christ, none of them could move him; yea, rather he gloried in them, and rejoiced that he was counted worthy to contend with them. But who can adequately describe his state? Who can tell the fervour of his desires after Christ, the zeal he had to promote his glory, the delight he felt in his service, and the assured prospects which he enjoyed of dwelling with Christ for ever? — — —]

Such was the state which Paul desired for all his auditors; and such we should all desire for ourselves—

[We should not be content with any thing short of the attainments that were made by Paul: nay, if we had attained

[d] John xv. 22 [e] Jam. iv. 17. [f] John iii. 19.

the same as he, we should still "forget what was behind, and reach forward to that which is before, and press toward the mark for the prize of our high calling." We are far from saying, that none are Christians indeed till they have attained his stature: but we must caution all against thinking themselves Christians, whilst there remains any one lust which they will not sacrifice for Christ, or any one duty they will not perform. The man that will not lay down life itself for Christ, cannot be his disciple. Behold then the pattern which we must all resemble: the love, the zeal, the patience, the entire devotedness of heart and life to Christ which were in Paul, must be in us: we must, in desire and endeavour at least, if not in actual attainment, be almost and altogether such as he was.

This must be the pattern for all who are *in the ministry*, or are *preparing for the ministry*, to aim at. We should not be like the idle shepherds who neglected their flocks; but like the Great Shepherd himself, who "laid down his life for his sheep:" and though we may be called to a sphere of small and limited extent, yet should we *be in that sphere, as Paul* was in the vast circle which he was called to fill: we should be servants to all for Christ's sake, and labour in season and out of season for every individual committed to our care.

If any, on account of their more exalted station, suppose that these observations are not applicable to them, let them remember who Festus and Agrippa were, and that the prayer in our text was offered up in the first place more immediately for them. The higher any are, the more needful is it for them to imitate all the graces and excellencies of the Apostle Paul.

But without confining it to any rank or order of men, I beg to express the Apostle's wish for "all that hear me this day." This is the state proper for all of every degree; and necessary for them also, if ever they would approve themselves to God — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. The wavering and undecided—

[Perhaps on account of your pious dispositions it may be said, you are "not far from the kingdom of heaven:" but to what purpose will this be, if you do not advance? It will be no consolation to you that you were once not far from the kingdom, if at last you are not admitted into it. But consider what it is that prevents you from becoming Christians altogether? Be assured, that, whatever it be, it will ultimately ruin your souls. The young man whom Jesus loved for the general amiableness of his character, was left to perish, when he refused to part with all for Christ. The Lord grant, that none of you may continue "almost persuaded," but that you

may all with one heart and one mind devote yourselves to him instantly and without reserve.]

2. Those who think themselves altogether persuaded to embrace Christ—

[It is not uncommon to feel a very fervent desire to serve the Lord at one time, and afterwards to relapse into a state of coldness and indifference. Our spiritual enemies often appear dead, when they are only lulled asleep for a season. But O! brethren, beware how you leave your first love, or look back after having put your hand to the plough. See the bright example before you: see how, like the sun in its course, he shined brighter and brighter to the perfect day. So do ye also proceed. Never think you have attained any thing, whilst any thing remains to be attained. Be never weary in well doing. Think what an ornament Paul was to his profession, and what a blessing to the world; and strive, that as God was glorified in him, so he may be more and more glorified in you also.]

OUTLINE NO. 1815

PAUL'S DELIVERANCE FROM SHIPWRECK.

Acts xxvii. 25. *Sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.*

WHATEVER difference there may sometimes appear between the dispensations of God's providence and the declarations of his word, we may be well assured that there never was, nor ever shall be, the slightest opposition between them. The declarations of God indeed may be conditional, when the conditions are not actually expressed; and then the event predicted, will be conformed, not to *the words*, but to *the spirit* of the declaration. This was remarkably the case with respect to Nineveh, which was spared, *apparently in opposition* to the threatenings denounced against them, but *really in conformity with* the conditions contained in them: but no word that was unconditionally uttered, ever failed of its accomplishment.

In the history of St. Paul there were strong and positive assurances given him, that he should preach the Gospel at Rome[a]. But various circumstances

[a] Acts xix. 21. and xxiii. 11.

arose from time to time, which threatened to defeat this purpose of the Most High. When Paul was seized in the temple, the people dragged him out with extreme violence, and "went about to kill him[b]:" and when he made his defence before them, they were wrought up almost to madness, and cried out, "Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live[c]!" The next day, when he was standing before the Jewish council, there arose so great a dissension between his auditors, that he was in danger of being "pulled in pieces by them[d]." Then there was a conspiracy of more than forty persons formed to take away his life[e]: and, when this was, almost by miracle, defeated, another conspiracy was formed and defeated in like manner, notwithstanding the judge himself strove to favour it[f]. At last he was sent by sea to Rome: but behold, he was overtaken with a storm, which seemed to cut off all hope of his ever arriving at his final destination. Even Paul himself appears now to have given up all expectation that his life would be spared: but God sent an angel to dissipate his fears, and to assure him, that what had been spoken to him respecting his standing before Cæsar, should certainly be accomplished[g]. This declaration the Apostle fully credited; and he took occasion from it to comfort and encourage all that were in the ship with him; "Sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me."

From these words, as verified in the event, we shall take occasion to set before you,

I. The office of faith—

[Faith is represented by St. Paul as "the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen:" and such it manifested itself to be in Paul at this time: he saw not how his deliverance was to be effected; but God had told him that the whole crew should be saved; and therefore he entertained no doubt whatever as to the issue of their present dangers.

Now this is exactly the office of faith in relation to every

[b] Acts xxi. 31. [c] Acts xxii. 22. [d] Acts xxiii. 10.
[e] Acts xxiii. 14, 15. [f] Acts xxv. 2, 3, 9—11. [g] ver. 24.

word of God. Whether God threaten or promise, we must regard the event as certain. Much is told us in the inspired volume respecting the salvation of all who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ — — — These promises we are to apprehend and rely upon, "not staggering at any of them," but having a confident assurance that they shall all be fulfilled to us in their season — — —]

We must not however separate from this,

II. The obligations of faith—

[When the peril of shipwreck became more imminent, the sailors, under pretence of casting anchors out of the fore-ship, would have endeavoured to save themselves in the boat: but Paul, perceiving their intentions, told the centurion and the soldiers, that unless the seamen continued in the ship, none of the crew could be saved[h]. But had not God promised absolutely, that not one life among them should be lost? How then could the desertion of a part of the crew prove the destruction of the whole? The answer to this is plain: God had ordained *the means* as well as *the end:* and to seek the one without using the other, was to *tempt* God, rather than to *trust* him.

Now this observation is of great importance, as reflecting light on the manner in which God accomplishes all his promises to us. He "has given us exceeding great and precious promises;" and no one of them shall ever fail; but we are not therefore at liberty to sit down idly, and to expect salvation without any exertions on our part: we must exert ourselves as much as if our success depended wholly on our own arm; and at the same time we are to trust in God as simply, as if no effort whatever were used by us. This is the mode prescribed by God himself. He tells us, that "eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ:" yet he says, "*Labour for* the meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man will *give* you[i]." The consideration of God's promised aid is so far from superseding our own personal exertions, that it is our great encouragement to put them forth[k]: and to look for salvation in any other way than that which God has marked out, is to deceive ourselves to our eternal ruin. The means and the end are equally ordained of God[l]: and what God has joined, it is in vain for man to put asunder.]

In performing these duties, we may expect,

III. The benefits of faith—

[h] ver. 31.

[i] John vi. 27. Compare with this, other passages of like import: Ezek. xxxvi. 36, 37. Prov. ii. 2—6.

[k] Phil. ii. 12, 13. [l] 2 Thess. ii. 13.

[Two benefits accrued to Paul and his associates, namely, *present peace*, and *final safety*. Notwithstanding the storm continued as violent as ever, and they had turned adrift the boat which they might have looked to as useful for their preservation, we behold the whole crew in a state of comparative peace and comfort[m]: and, in the issue, every one of them obtained the desire of his soul; for though the ship grounded, and was broken in pieces, all were saved at last; some by swimming to shore, and others on boards and the broken pieces of the ship.

Here we behold an exact representation of the benefits which faith in Christ will always obtain. We shall be brought to a state of sweet composure, notwithstanding we are yet in the midst of a tumultuous world, and menaced with dangers on every side: we shall "be filled with joy and peace in believing[n]," yea "with joy unspeakable and glorified[o]"——— Our anticipation of a successful issue to our conflicts will be almost, as it were, an antepast of heaven[p]. Nor shall we be disappointed of our hope at last[q]. Our way may be "through much tribulation:" yea, we may "be scarcely saved[r]," that is, with vast difficulty; we may "be saved so as by fire[s]:" but we shall never perish: "it is not the will of our Father that one of his little ones should perish[t];" nor shall one grain, however sifted, or however small, be missing from his garner[u].]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are proceeding on their voyage without any apprehension of danger—

[The mariners, though warned by Paul, thought little of danger till it was too late. And have not we innumerable warnings from all the inspired writers? yet we go forward thinking of little but temporal ease and prosperity. But how soon may the hour arrive, when, like the mariners, we shall be glad to part with all that we possess, for the preservation even of our bodily lives, and much more for the salvation of our souls! Let us in a time of ease and prosperity consider this, and stand prepared for troubles and for death itself. That servant alone is truly "blessed, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find thus watching."]

2. Those who are harassed with storms and tempests—

[Many there are, who, in this ever-changing state of things, are "afflicted and tossed with tempest, and not comforted."

[m] ver. 36. [n] Rom. xv. 13. [o] 1 Pet. i. 8.
[p] Rom. viii. 33—39. [q] Isai. xlv. 17. [r] 1 Pet. iv. 18.
[s] 1 Cor. iii. 15. [t] Matt. xviii. 14. [u] Amos ix. 9.

But, blessed be God, they have "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast." "The promises made to us in Christ, are sure to all the seed." However imminent our danger may appear, we should not despond: "there is help laid for us on One that is mighty," on One, who is "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him." Fear not then, but only believe; and whatever difficulties you may have to encounter, you have the promise of your Lord and Saviour, that "none shall pluck you out of his hand;" and his Father's veracity and power, no less than his own, are pledged for your everlasting salvation[x].]

[x] John x. 28, 29.

OUTLINE NO. 1816

PAUL BITTEN BY A VIPER, AND UNINJURED.

Acts xxviii. 3—6. *And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.*

IT is curious to observe how, in this chequered scene of life, judgments and mercies, trials and deliverances, crosses and comforts, are intermixed. In the space of a few hours Paul was shipwrecked, and saved; destitute, and relieved; bitten by a viper, and preserved from injury; judged as a murderer, and honoured as a god.

These events, though not of primary importance, are yet deserving of consideration.

The inhabitants of Malta, here called "Barbarians," as not being learned and polished like the Greeks and Romans, shewed great kindness and hospitality to the shipwrecked crew: and in this they put to shame many who bear the Christian name, who would have plundered, rather than relieved, the unhappy sufferers. A fire being made to warm the

people and to dry their clothes, St. Paul gladly exerted himself for the general good, and, gathering a bundle of sticks, put them on the fire. But a viper that had lain concealed in the fagot, no sooner felt the heat, than he seized the hand of Paul, and held it fast with his teeth. Paul however, betraying no fear, held up his hand for a time with great composure, and then shook off the venomous creature into the fire. This event gave rise to various conjectures, which now we proceed to notice.

Let us see,

I. In what light it was viewed by the people present—

At first they regarded it as a judgment on him for some heinous crime—

[There is even in the minds of heathens some idea of a superintending Providence, who, though in general inattentive to the concerns of men, interposes sometimes on great occasions, especially to detect and punish the crime of murder. The first thought therefore of the spectators was, that Paul was thus singled out as a monument of Divine vengeance, which, though it had spared him in the shipwreck, would not suffer his iniquity to pass unpunished.

Now this sentiment is to a certain degree just: but it is erroneous when carried to too great an extent. Certain it is that God does on some occasions mark, as it were, in a visible manner his indignation against sin: but in numberless instances even the most aggravated transgressions pass unpunished in this life, and are reserved for adequate retribution to the judgment of the great day. It is certain also that temporal calamities are by no means to be regarded as certain marks of God's displeasure: for they are often sent as fruits of his paternal love[a]. The great error of Job's friends was, that they judged him as a hypocrite, because of the heavy calamities that came upon him: and our blessed Lord has especially guarded us against forming such uncharitable conclusions, in relation to those whose blood Pilate mingled with the sacrifices, or those on whom the tower of Siloam fell[b]. The truth is, that in this world "all things come alike to all;" "nor can any man know either love or hatred by all that is before him[c]." Josiah, as well as Saul or Ahab, may be slain in battle; and Paul, as well as the rebellious Israelites, may be bitten by a serpent: and therefore to condemn any on account of the afflictions with which they are visited, is to act like those who accounted David, yea,

[a] Heb. xii. 6. [b] Luke xiii. 1—5. [c] Eccl. ix. 1—3

and Christ himself, as judicially stricken and smitten of their God[d].]

Afterwards, they considered it as an evidence that he was a god—

[As the heathen imagined that there was a superior Being who punished sin, so they believed that their gods sometimes "came down to them in the likeness of men[e]." Hence, when the people saw that Paul had sustained no injury, they concluded that he must be a god. But here they ran to an opposite extreme. Having no knowledge of the only true God, and of his power to protect his servants, they missed entirely the true construction, which they should have put upon the event before them. But indeed, there is this propensity in every man to judge too favourably of those who prosper, as well as too unfavourably of those who suffer. The just medium can be attained by those only, who investigate matters with a dispassionate mind, and take every thing into consideration that should regulate and decide the judgment.]

From shewing in what light *they* viewed the event, we proceed to consider,

II. In what light it should be viewed—

God had doubtless some gracious design in this dispensation. We apprehend it was intended by him,

1. As a means whereby to awaken their attention to his Gospel—

[Paul was sent to Rome that he might testify of Christ in Cæsar's palace. And as he was now on his way thither, God ordained that he should have an opportunity of making known the Saviour to the barbarians at Malta. But Paul was now a prisoner, and therefore not likely to gain much attention from the people: besides that, he was not at liberty to go amongst them as he would willingly have done. But, by this miracle, the attention of all was instantly fixed on him, and a way was opened for a free communication of the Gospel of Christ. That he availed himself of the opportunity, we cannot doubt: and that he had considerable success, there is reason to conclude, from the gratitude expressed by all ranks of people amongst them at his departure.

The same object, we apprehend, God has in view, by numberless dispensations which occur from time to time. Both mercies and judgments are continually represented as designed of God for this end; "And they shall know that I am the Lord." The miraculous powers with which the Apostles were

[d] Ps. xli. 8. Isai. liii. 4. [e] Acts xiv. 11.

invested were not *credentials only*, for the authenticating of their divine mission, but *means also* of recommending the Gospel to the attention and acceptance of men. And we shall do well to regard the various events that are now passing in the world, as calls from God to embrace and hold fast the Gospel of Christ.]

2. As a standing memorial of the care which God takes of all his faithful servants—

[Many and glorious are the promises which God gives us of security in his service. That we are not to expect visible and miraculous interpositions in our favour, is true: but we are not to suppose that he will leave us to the influence of blind chance, or give us up into the hand of our inveterate enemies. Were his gracious care withdrawn, "Satan would soon sift every one of us as wheat." But Jehovah keeps us in his everlasting arms, so that "no weapon that is formed against us can prosper." As our Lord could not be apprehended till his time was come, so neither can any of his faithful people be destroyed, till God himself has signed the warrant. See how amply this is set forth by David[f], and in the book of Job[g]: and shall these promises fail of their accomplishment? "Hath God said, and will he not do it; hath he spoken, and will he not make it good?" The promises made directly to the Apostles, must, as to their literal sense, be limited to them[h]: but, in the spirit of them, they must be applied to all, who put themselves under the shadow of Jehovah's wing[i]. "The wrath of man shall praise him:" and every occurrence, however adverse to the eye of sense, shall work for the present and eternal good of all his faithful people[k].]

Let us LEARN then from hence,

1. Justice to man—

[We all are prone to judge one another: but this is to usurp the prerogative of Jehovah. The command of Christ, and of his Apostles is, "Judge not;" "Judge nothing before the time, &c.[l]"]

2. Confidence in God—

[It may be, that in the service of our God our trials may be great and numerous; yea, and we may be judged by our fellow-creatures with the severest judgment: but we may

[f] Ps. xci. 9—13.
[g] Job v. 19—23.
[h] Mark xvi. 17, 18. Luke x. 19.
[i] Ps. xci. 3—7.
[k] Rom. viii. 28. 2 Cor. iv. 17.
[l] Matt. vii. 1, 2. 1 Cor. iv. 5

safely commit every event to him[m], assured, that he will "bring forth our righteousness as the noon-day," if not in this world, yet most certainly in the world to come.]

[m] 1 Cor. iv. 3.

OUTLINE NO. 1817

THE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST EVIL SPOKEN OF.

Acts xxviii. 22. *We desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.*

AS prejudice is easily excited in the mind, so is its operation extremely powerful, wherever it is entertained. An opprobrious term will often convey more in one moment, than could be conveyed otherwise in many sentences: and, as superseding the necessity of any specific accusations, it is generally resorted to as the means of bringing either persons or things into general contempt. The enemies of Christianity in every age have availed themselves of this advantage, to decry a religion which they did not choose to embrace. Thus, when St. Paul came to Rome, and had convened the principal Jews to his lodgings, he found, that, though no accusations had been brought against *him*, his religion, and all who professed it, were regarded in an odious light, through the malignant misrepresentations of their adversaries. Let us then inquire,

I. Whence it was that the Gospel was so universally evil spoken of in the apostolic age—

That the Gospel was universally reviled, is obvious from the decided manner in which the notoriety of the fact is mentioned in the text; "We know it:" and it was so chiefly on two grounds;

1. As being impious in itself—

[*The Jews* regarded it as subversive of the law of Moses. They could not see, that Jesus was the person to whom Moses and the prophets had borne witness: they could not see, that he had actually fulfilled the law, and was himself the substance, of which that was only the shadow: they therefore conceived

his pretensions to be in direct opposition to God's revealed will; and his religion to be a system of impiety altogether — — — — *The Gentiles* also, finding that Christianity required an utter dereliction of all their false gods, and at the same time presented to them no visible object of worship, accounted all its professors atheists. They knew indeed that Christians worshipped Him who died for them on Mount Calvary: but that seemed only to add folly to impiety; since to regard him as a *God* and a *Saviour*, who, to all appearance, was not even able to save himself, was an act of absurdity, in their eyes, bordering on madness — — —]

2. As injurious to mankind—

[To *individuals* it was supposed to be a source of distraction to the mind, and of immorality in the life. Even the Head of this religion, the despised Nazarene, was thought to be "beside himself;" nor were his followers in any better plight; since they professed to turn their backs upon all visible good, and to follow a good that was invisible. Moreover, in the midst of these high pretensions, they were supposed to be addicted to all manner of licentious habits, even such as the Gentiles themselves scarcely ventured to indulge[a].

To *families*, this religion was considered as a source of incalculable mischief; since, wherever it came, it set the nearest relatives against each other, as even the Founder of it himself had declared it would[b].

It was hostile also *to* the welfare of *the state*. It inculcated many things which the Roman laws forbad, and prohibited many things which they enjoined. It set up a king above Cæsar himself[c]. Was such a religion as this to be tolerated? No: every sensible governor would give the same direction respecting it, as Haman gave in relation to the Jews; that it ought to be banished from the face of the earth[d].]

But, now that Christianity is established, does the same prejudice against it remain? Let us inquire into this matter, and see,

II. How far it meets with similar treatment at this day—

The name of Christianity is still odious among millions of the human race; and, even among those who call themselves Christians, the true Gospel is disapproved and detested by multitudes, who are

[a] 1 Pet. ii. 12. and iii. 16. [b] Matt. x. 34—36.
[c] Acts xvi. 20, 21. and xvii. 6, 7. and xxiv. 5, 6.
[d] Esth. iii. 8, 9.

ready to number themselves among its warmest advocates. It is hated on many accounts;

1. As too humiliating in its representations—

[It represents the whole human race as in a state of guilt and condemnation, and as utterly incapable of delivering themselves by any thing that they can do. It presents to their view a Saviour, in and through whom all their wants must be supplied, and to whom they must stand indebted for their whole salvation, from first to last[e]. But men cannot endure to think themselves so guilty, so polluted, so enslaved, so utterly helpless and hopeless, as the Scripture represents them to be; and this will be found to be at the root of all their objections against the Gospel: examine all the writings of those who oppose the truth, and this will appear to be the leading feature of them, that they suppose some degree of goodness and sufficiency to remain in fallen man; whilst the Gospel declares, that we are "altogether become abominable[f]," and that even the will, as well as the power, to do good must be given us from the Lord[g].]

2. As too easy in its proposals—

[It offers salvation freely to every human being, saying, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved[h]." It requires nothing on our parts to *earn* salvation, nothing to *merit* it; but only to receive it thankfully as the free gift of God to us in Christ Jesus[i]. But the proud heart of man does not like to be so indebted to the free grace of God: that invitation, "Come, ye that have no money, come buy wine and milk without money and without price," is offensive to him: he would rather hear of some duties to perform that shall render him worthy of God's favour, and of some good works to be done, in order to form a ground of glorying before God: and, if works be declared to be utterly ineffectual to these ends, he immediately supposes them to be unnecessary altogether, and that we leave men at liberty to indulge in all manner of licentiousness.]

3. As too strict in its requirements—

[We stop not now to notice the inconsistency between the former objection and this: suffice it to say, that they are made by the same persons, and oftentimes almost in the same breath. The Gospel requires, that we mortify all sin whatever; that we "crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts;" and that we "live altogether not to ourselves, but unto Him that died for us, and rose again." But this is supposed to be incompatible

[e] 1 Cor. i. 30. [f] Rom. iii. 10—19. [g] Phil. ii. 13.
[h] Mark xvi. 16. Acts xvi. 30, 31. [i] Rom. vi. 23.

with all the common offices of life: and we are represented as making the way to heaven so strait, that none but a few devotees can hope to enter into it.

Thus the truth of God is in reality traduced, as in the days of old, and, though the name of Christianity is honoured, the life and power of it are despised.]

Since then the Gospel is still evil spoken of to such a degree, permit me to state,

III. What is our duty in relation to it—

We should endeavour to get all possible information respecting it.

[It would be strange indeed to form our judgment solely from the representations of its enemies: we ought assuredly to hear its friends also, and to learn what they have to say in its favour. If then we can have access to any who are qualified to instruct us, we should say to them, as the Jews did to Paul, "We desire to hear what thou thinkest." Were this step taken, and with any measure of candour, I have no doubt but that the prejudices against the Gospel would soon be done away. But there is one, to whom we may all have access, and whose judgment may be fully relied on; I mean, that very person to whom the Jews at Rome applied, even the Apostle Paul himself. No man had ever juster or deeper views of the Gospel than he; and no man has written so fully respecting it as he: consult him therefore: study those Epistles of his in which the subject is most fully stated, the Epistles to the Romans, the Galatians, and the Ephesians. From those may be fully learned the doctrines which the Gospel maintains: and in his life may be seen the practice it requires. Go then, and sit at his feet, and ask of him in relation to every thing we have spoken, "What thinkest *thou?*"]

Our inquiries, however, should not be merely speculative, but practical—

[We should not, like Pilate, ask, "What is truth?" and then go away without any desire to be informed: but should imitate rather the man whose blindness had been healed, "Who is the Son of God, that I may believe on him[k]?" All our inquiries should be with a view to practice, and with a determination of heart to follow the light whithersoever it may lead us. Did we, like the Beræans, search the Scriptures daily with this view, it would soon be said of us, as it was of them, "Therefore many of them believed[l]."

We will now, by way of IMPROVEMENT,

[k] John ix. 36. [l] Acts xvii. 11. 12.

1. Give a specific answer to the question ourselves—

[Is it asked by any, "What thinkest thou" of the Gospel itself, and of the people who profess it? We reply, that, in our judgment, the plain simple doctrine of salvation by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, is, "the wisdom of God, and the power of God,' even "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth;" and that its proper title is, "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God." As for those who profess it, we say, that, if they walk unworthy of it, they are hypocrites, and self-deceivers: but, if they adorn it by a suitable life and conversation, then are they "the excellent of the earth," "the Church of the living God," "the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty." Of them will we say, with Moses, "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved of the Lord[m]?" Whoever may speak against them, they may be of good courage; for God approves them, and will confess them as his before the assembled universe. They shall assuredly "be his, in the day that he shall make up his jewels[n]."]

2. Put the question to every one here present—

[What thinkest THOU? *Dost thou think the doctrines of the Gospel so objectionable as the world represents them to be?* Compare those doctrines with thine own wants and necessities; and then say, whether they do not contain the very remedy which thou standest in need of? — — — Would Paul have represented them as containing "the unsearchable riches of Christ;" and would the angels be represented as ever "desiring to look into them," if they were unworthy of our regard?

Again, *Dost thou think that those who embrace the Gospel deserve the ignominious appellation of "a sect?"* By this name they were called in the first ages; and by this name they are yet too often called. But, because "they worship God in a way which *the world calls* heresy," are they therefore heretics? No: they are "the general assembly and Church of the First-born, which are written in heaven;" they are the living stones of which his temple is composed; and they are now, and shall to all eternity continue, the habitation of God through the Spirit[o].

Once more; *Dost thou think, that, because "they are everywhere evil spoken of," thou shouldest not join thyself to them?* Sad indeed is thy state, if thou entertainest such a thought as that: for, "if thou art ashamed of Christ, of thee will Christ be ashamed," when he shall come in his glory to judge the world. Remember the choice of Moses, and ask, Whether it

[m] Deut. xxxiii. 29. [n] Mal. iii. 17.
[o] Heb. xii. 23. 1 Pet. ii. 5. Eph. ii. 19—22.

be not that which thou shouldest make[p]? If the circumstance of the Lord's people being universally "evil spoken of" appear an argument *against* them, know, that it is greatly *in their favour;* and that, if you belong to a party that is *not* universally evil spoken of by the ungodly world, you are not of the party to which Paul belonged, nor shall have your portion with him in the eternal world.

What though they be "a little flock?" they are those to whom "it is the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom[q]." What if they be walking in "a strait and narrow, unfrequented path?" it is "the path that leadeth unto life," whilst all other paths, however frequented, "lead only to destruction[r]." The time is shortly coming, when they who now most loudly condemn them, will yet still more loudly condemn themselves; "We fools counted their life madness, and their end to be without honour: but now they are numbered with the saints[s]," &c.

To all then I say, Beware what sentiments you imbibe respecting the Gospel of Christ; and beg of God that you may so think of it in this world, as you will assuredly think of it in the world to come.]

[p] Heb. xi. 24—26. [q] Luke xii. 32.
[r] Matt. vii. 13, 14. [s] Wisd. v. 4.

OUTLINE NO. 1818

THE GOSPEL SENT TO THE GENTILES.

Acts xxviii. 28. *Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.*

WHEN we consider how often we are called together to hear the word of God, we are surprised and humbled to find so little good done by it. But the Apostles themselves had the same cause for complaint as we. We can scarcely conceive a more solemn occasion than that on which the Jews at Rome were convened to hear the Gospel. St. Paul was brought thither as a prisoner, on account of his zeal and fidelity in the cause of Christ. The Jews were anxious to know from himself what were the peculiar doctrines which he maintained: and, having appointed a day for that purpose, they came to his lodging, and attended to his discourse from morning to evening.

But, alas! the greater part of them rejected his testimony, and drew from him that solemn admonition, which had, many hundred years before, been given to their fathers: he told them that they were given up to judicial blindness; and that the consolation which he in vain sought amongst them, he should find amongst the Gentiles; who were ordained of God to inherit those blessings which they despised.

There are two things which we propose to notice on the present occasion:

I. The salvation here spoken of—

It is of great importance to observe the terms by which the Gospel is here designated: it is called "the salvation of God."

It is "salvation"—

[The true nature of the Gospel is by no means generally understood. The generality conceive it to be nothing more than a new system of duties. There are some, however, who appear to be acquainted with its nature to a certain extent, but materially fail when they come to explain themselves more fully. They will speak of our condemnation by the law, and our inability to save ourselves according to the terms of the first covenant: they will also represent Christ as introducing a new covenant, and as the Author of salvation to all who believe in him. Thus far they are right: but when it is inquired what are the terms of the new covenant, and how it is that Christ saves his people, they shew that "they have need to be taught afresh what be the first principles of the Oracles of God." They say that Christ has procured for us a milder law, which requires only sincere obedience: and that, if we endeavour to obey that law, his death shall atone for our imperfections, and his righteousness shall make up for our defects. But this representation of Christ's work very ill accords with the terms by which the Gospel is characterized in the text. The Gospel in that view would be only a new law; and salvation by it would be, in fact, salvation by works, and not by grace. However the law itself be reduced, if our obedience to it, either in whole or in part, be the ground of our acceptance with God, it is salvation by works; and the performers of those works will have to glory before God. Let our justification depend ever so little on our works, the case will be precisely the same: we shall have *some* ground of boasting within ourselves: if not *so much* as we should have had by the first covenant, still we have *some*: which clearly proves, that

this idea of the Gospel is erroneous: for the Gospel excludes boasting altogether [a].

The truth is, that the Gospel is a revelation of "salvation," of salvation wrought out for us by the Son of God; wrought out, I say, entirely by his obedience unto death. It views men as lost, entirely lost and undone in themselves. It represents Christ as assuming our nature, to obey that law which we had broken, and endure those penalties which we had incurred: and it declares, that all who will come to Christ, relying wholly on his blood and righteousness, shall be accepted through him. It is true, it requires works as evidences of our faith; but the only ground which it proposes for our justification before God, is the all-sufficient righteousness of Jesus Christ. In a word, it reveals and offers to us a salvation purchased by the blood of Christ, and freely given to all who believe in him.]

It is emphatically called "the salvation of God"—

[This salvation was altogether *planned by God.* No created Being could have devised such a scheme for saving man in perfect consistency with all the Divine perfections ——— It was *executed by God,* who miraculously formed the human nature of Christ in the womb of a virgin, and upheld him in every part of his most arduous undertaking, and raised him from the dead, and constituted him Head over all things to the Church, that he might finish the work he had begun, and secure to himself the souls which he has purchased with his blood ——— Finally, it was in every respect *worthy of God;* such a display of wisdom, of goodness, and of all his glorious perfections, as will be the one object of wonder, love, and praise, to all eternity ———

As for the system which men have substituted in its place, it is indeed "another Gospel," which the Apostles never knew, and which God never revealed. It deserves not to be called "the salvation of God;" for it is no salvation at all: nor would any creature be ever saved by it. Who will undertake to tell us what that quantum of imperfection is which it allows of; or to define the exact limits of that sincerity which it requires? It is the offspring of pride and ignorance; and will be the parent of everlasting misery, to all who embrace it. That only is the true Gospel, which leaves to man no ground of glorying in himself, but gives all the glory of his salvation to God alone.]

[a] Rom. iii. 27.

Let us next turn our attention to,

II. The things affirmed respecting it—

We cannot but observe the solemnity with which the Apostle's affirmations are introduced. But there was occasion for it, because the things which he asserted appeared altogether incredible. He asserted,

1. That the Gospel salvation was sent to the Gentiles—

[Of this the Jews had no conception. Being habituated to consider themselves as exclusively the Lord's people, and to regard the Gentiles as dogs, they could not even listen to the idea that the wall of partition should ever be broken down, and the Gentiles be incorporated with the Church of God[b]. And the Apostles themselves were exceeding slow to admit the thought, notwithstanding they had been commanded to "go into all the world, and to preach the Gospel to every creature." Even six years after our Lord's ascension, Peter himself could not be prevailed upon to go and instruct a heathen family, without repeated visions to convince him that it was agreeable to the mind of God: and, when he had done it, he was called to an account for it by the whole College of Apostles, who were pacified only by the relation which he gave of the different visions, and the testimony which God himself bore to his conduct by pouring out upon them the gift of the Holy Ghost. When convinced by his arguments, they exclaimed with surprise, "Then hath God unto the Gentiles granted repentance unto life[c]. But the Apostle here declares that God had sent salvation to the Gentiles, and that it should be sent to them throughout all the world. To this he adds,]

2. That they would hear it—

[The Jews, notwithstanding they had enjoyed the ministry of Christ, and beheld his miracles, and had his resurrection so abundantly attested; notwithstanding an appeal also was constantly made to their own Inspired Writings, and the accomplishment of acknowledged prophecies was pointed out to them,—notwithstanding every advantage, I say, they would not believe. The probability therefore was, that, if they, with all their means of information, rejected the Gospel, much more would the Heathen reject it. But God foresaw that they would receive it, or rather, fore-ordained that they

[b] Acts xxii. 21, 22. [c] Acts xi. 18.

should. Accordingly, we find that millions in every quarter of the globe have been made obedient to the faith; and we are assured that all "the fulness of the Gentiles shall in due time come in[d]" ——— To God nothing is impossible; and he who has thus far accomplished his word, will certainly fulfil it to the end. The grain of mustard-seed shall become a great tree, and all the birds of heaven come and dwell under its shadow.]

In this subject will be found abundant matter,

1. For reproof—

[It is in this view principally that the words were uttered. And if St. Paul had so much reason to complain when he saw the Jews were not persuaded to embrace Christianity by one sermon, what reason have we to complain, when persons professing Christianity cannot be prevailed upon by hundreds of sermons to walk in any measure worthy of their profession! Surely thousands of the poor Heathen,—Indians, Hottentots, Hindoos,—who have received the word with gladness, and experienced the blessedness of this salvation, will rise up in judgment against us, and condemn us. Yes, amongst *them* there are many who value this salvation more than life itself. Ah! how will they reprove our supineness and indifference! Well;—be it known unto you, that if you, who call yourselves Christians, will not value the Gospel as you ought, it shall be taken away from you, and be given to others who will bring forth the fruits thereof with gladness———]

2. For encouragement—

[When exertions are recommended for the conversion of the Heathen, it is common to say, They will not renounce their superstitions; and we cannot attain their language so as to hope for any success in our endeavours. But if God has sent the Gospel to the Heathen, and declared that they will hear it, we may well look to him to overcome all the difficulties that lie in our way——— But it may be said, The time is not come. What right have we to say this? or what reason

[d] The prophet Ezekiel, in a vision of a river proceeding from the Sanctuary, and becoming gradually so deep that it could not be forded, represents the progress of the Gospel. The river running into the Dead Sea, where, it is said, no fish can live, instantly healed the sea, so that living fish of every kind became innumerable. The Dead Sea fitly marked the state of the Heathen world; and the effect produced upon it by the waters of the Sanctuary, marked the change which the Gospel should infallibly produce. Ezek. xlvii. 9.

to imagine it? If we consider the exertions that are making in the Christian world for the translating of the Scriptures into different languages, and for sending the Gospel to the remotest corners of the earth, we have reason rather to hope that the time is come. But the time as it respects us is always come; and there is no period when we ought not to exert ourselves in the cause of God, and for the benefit of our fellow-creatures. The question then is, If God has sent salvation to the Heathen, who is willing to carry it? for "they cannot believe, unless they hear; nor can they hear without a preacher." O that there were amongst us more, whose hearts the Lord had "touched with a live coal from off his altar," that when he says, "Who will go for us? would immediately reply, Here am I, send me!" This was the Prophet's frame of mind even when God told him that his ministrations would have no other effect than that of hardening the minds of men[e]. It was sufficient for him that he was doing the Lord's work. How much more then should we be ready to carry the Gospel to the Heathen, when God pledges himself to us that they will hear it! Let us pray to God, that since the harvest is so great, he would send forth labourers; and, if we cannot do all we would, let us, each in his station, do all we can———]

[e] Isai. vi. 6—10.